

**Cracks in the
Dome:
Fractured
Histories of**

Sarah Longair

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Cracks in the Dome
Fractured Histories of Empire in
the Zanzibar Museum, 1897–1964
SARAH LONGAIR



ROUTLEDGE


CRACKS IN THE DOME: FRACTURED HISTORIES OF EMPIRE IN THE ZANZIBAR MUSEUM, 1897– 1964

As one of the most monumental and recognisable landmarks from Zanzibar's years as a British Protectorate, the distinctive domed building of the distinctive domed building of the Zanzibar Museum (also known as the *Beit al-Amani* or Peace Memorial Museum) is widely known and familiar to Zanzibaris and visitors alike. Yet the complicated and compelling history behind its construction and collection has been overlooked by historians until now. Drawing on a rich and wide range of hitherto unexplored archival, photographic, architectural and material evidence, this book is the first serious investigation of this remarkable institution. Although the museum was not opened until 1925, this book traces the longer history of colonial display which culminated in the establishment of the Zanzibar Museum. It reveals the complexity of colonial knowledge production in the changing political context of the twentieth century British Empire and explores the broad spectrum of people from diverse communities who shaped its existence as staff, informants, collectors and teachers. Through vivid narratives involving people, objects and exhibits, This book exposes the fractures, contradictions and tensions in creating and maintaining a colonial museum, and casts light on the conflicted character of the 'colonial mission' in eastern Africa.

Sarah Longair received her PhD from Birkbeck, University of London, and currently works in the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum. Her research explores British colonial history in East Africa and the Indian Ocean world through material and visual culture. She has published several book chapters and articles, and has co-edited the volume Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience (2012) and two special issues of the Museums History Journal.

For Deborah and Malcolm

Cracks in the Dome: Fractured Histories of Empire in the Zanzibar Museum, 1897–1964

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First published 2015 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Longair, Sarah, author.

Cracks in the Dome: Fractured Histories of Empire in the Zanzibar Museum, 1897–1964 / by Sarah Longair.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Peace Memorial Museum (Zanzibar) – History. 2. Historical museums –

Tanzania – Zanzibar – History. 3. Historic buildings – Tanzania – Zanzibar.

4. Collectors and collecting – Tanzania – Zanzibar. 5. Zanzibar – History –

1890–1964. I. Title.

DT449.Z28L66 2015

ISBN: 9781472437877 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781315574523 (ebk-PDF)

ISBN: 9781317158769 (ebk-ePUB)

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the staff of the many institutions where I have undertaken research throughout this project. In the Zanzibar National Archives, Himidi Omar and his colleagues were tireless in providing me with material during several visits, including a long period of six months in 2009 when I visited daily. Khamis Ali and Maneno Khamis at the House of Wonders (the Zanzibar National Museum) took me on several occasions to the stores of that museum and the original Zanzibar Museum enabling me to study the remnants of the displays. I was fortunate that during my long visit in 2009 to use the Z.I.O.R.I. library, set up by Prof Abdul Sheriff, now sadly closed. The staff there, especially Saleh Mohammed Saleh, were welcoming and helpful, and I appreciated the opportunity to give a lecture to students and scholars there and hear their responses. Friends in Zanzibar have given great encouragement and kind hospitality as well as insights into the local history. I would also like to thank Dr Kiprop Lagat and colleagues in the National Museums of Kenya, and the staff of other museums and institutions in East Africa: the National Museum of Tanzania, the Kenya National Archives, National Museums of Kenya, the Stoneham Museum and the Uganda Museum.

In the United Kingdom, I have explored many of the rich archival resources across the country and been aided by the expertise of archivists: Anne Thomson at Newnham College Archives and Imogen Gunn at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology who were integral in recovering the story of Ailsa Nicol Smith; Lucy McCann for her intimate knowledge of the African history archives at Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford; Joy Wheeler at the Royal Geographical Society who showed me W. H. Ingrams's lantern slides; James Hammill and Sovati Smith in the Anthropology Library and Research Centre at the British Museum for ongoing support; and the staffs of the National Archives, Kew, the Cambridge University Library, the National Library of Scotland and the British Library, in the latter, particularly those who repeatedly assisted me with the microfilm reader for examining early copies of the Zanzibar Gazette.

The research in East Africa was made possible thanks to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, Birkbeck, University of London, the British Museum and the British Institute of Eastern Africa. I am especially grateful for these grants as I recognise the value of

sustained time in overseas archives for this project.

This book has emerged from my doctoral thesis, which I undertook part-time over five years at Birkbeck, while working at the British Museum. My sincerest appreciation goes to my supervisors, Hilary Sapire and Annie Coombes, who guided me intellectually through the research and writing process. Their insights, care and enthusiasm made that period an extremely stimulating and enjoyable experience. Comments on the thesis from my examiners, Felix Driver and David Anderson, have been essential in developing the work and expanding it into this volume. I also would like to thank the anonymous readers for helping to guide the manuscript into its final state.

I have been fortunate to work with the excellent team at Ashgate, with thanks to my editor Emily Yates for her sound advice and work on the book. Portions of this research have appeared in expanded forms in different publications, including the *Museums History Journal* and *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) which I co-edited with John McAleer, as well as being included in two forthcoming books: *Britain and the Narration of Travel in the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd) edited by Kate Hill, and *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) edited by John Mackenzie and John McAleer.

My colleagues across many departments in the British Museum have been a constant source of support and information: in particular, Nicholas Badcott, Lissant Bolton, JD Hill, Julie Hudson, Chris Spring, Roberta Tomber and Richard Woff, and former members of staff John Mack and Malcolm McLeod. I wish to highlight the encouragement given to me many years ago by the late Claude Ardouin with whom I had several inspiring conversations about museums in Africa, which led to my decision to study Zanzibar.

I would also like to thank the countless people I have listened to and met at conferences and workshops throughout the course of this research. Presenting ideas and receiving feedback has informed the development of this book and I have benefitted greatly from the mutually supportive scholarly environment.

The following people have given invaluable comments and insights, either in person or via correspondence: Clare Anderson, William Bissell, James Campbell, Zeynep Çelik, Jan Georg Deutsch, Catherine Eagleton, Elizabeth Edwards, Margot Finn, Kate Hill, Mark Horton, David Johnson, Jonathan Jackson, Elizabeth Lambourn, Gabrielle Lynch, Conal McCarthy, John MacKenzie, Sophie Mew, Tamson Pietsch, Dean Sinclair, Andrea Scheibler, Abdul Sheriff, Martin Walsh,

Claire Wintle, Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Peter Yeandle. I greatly regret that Leila Ingrams, who enthusiastically encouraged me in researching her father's story, passed away in the final stages of editing this book. I am particularly indebted to Alex Bremner, Claire Davies, John McAleer and Sabrina Rahman who, along with the aforementioned supervisors, examiners and readers, have nobly read and commented on earlier versions of this text.

Friends and family in the UK and in Zanzibar have ceaselessly encouraged me, easing the pressure of producing a book alongside a full-time job. My brother Mark and his partner Jenny have steadfastly cheered me and provided great reassurance throughout the project. My greatest debt is to my parents, Deborah and Malcolm, whose unflinching love and support continues to be an inspiration.

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Note on Terminology and Abbreviations

The museum in Zanzibar was named the Peace Memorial Museum and *Beit al-Amari* at its opening. By the mid-1930s, when the first regular museum reports were published, it was referred to as the ‘Zanzibar Museum’ although the two names were still used interchangeably. I will use the ‘Zanzibar Museum’ for convenience though during its construction, the subject of [Chapter 2](#), I will use ‘Peace Memorial’ as this was used during the building process and is more appropriate and indicative of the meaning of the building to its architect. I will use the ‘Museum’ and the ‘Archives’ to refer specifically to the Zanzibar examples, while the ‘museum’, ‘museums’ or ‘archives’ will be used when discussing these institutions in general.

The British categorised Zanzibar’s population in four basic groups: European, Arab, Indian and African. I discuss the complications with and implications of these categories in more detail in the Introduction. In brief, ‘African’ in this context included indigenous Swahili communities who had lived in Zanzibar for centuries as well as former slaves brought from the mainland in the nineteenth century and recent immigrants from the African continental interior. I will specify between these groups where possible. I will use the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Indian’ but recognise that there was diversity within these communities. ‘kiSwahili’ refers to the language.

Zanzibar encompasses the group of islands including Unguja, the largest island also known as Zanzibar Island, Pemba and Tumbatu. Most of the activity described in this book takes place on Unguja/Zanzibar Island.

Abbreviations

~~CEC~~ Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies

~~ASP~~ Shirazi Party

~~EKE~~ Educational Kinema Experiment

~~BM~~ British Museum

~~MAA~~ Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

~~MAE~~ Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (now Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology – CMAA)

~~UKT~~ Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

~~NIA~~ Kenya National Archives

~~MA~~ Museums Association

MI National Museum of Tanzania
RCSL Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge
RGS Royal Geographical Society
RH Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford
TNA The National Archives, UK
ZNA Zanzibar National Archives
ZNP Zanzibar Nationalist Party

Introduction: Zanzibar, Museums and the British Empire

On 28 June 1922, two years into the construction of the ambitious new museum building in Zanzibar, a tragic accident occurred. The *Official Gazette* for the Zanzibar Protectorate reported the news:

The Zanzibar Peace Memorial sustained serious damage shortly before noon on Tuesday last by the collapse of the North wall and one of its hexagonal sides. Unfortunately a Memon workman, who was with others on the scaffolding, fell with the masonry and was fatally injured. A Somali labourer also suffered a broken leg and three other labourers were slightly injured by the falling masonry and scaffolding.¹

Investigations into the cause initially blamed the Indian building contractors. Following pressure from the Colonial Office to explain the disaster, the investigators identified the untested form of the cement composition, one that omitted *udongo* – a local drying material. The escalating cost of the project and the difficulties with the construction prompted an overhaul of the building's design, which should have been the pinnacle of a 23-year career in Zanzibar of the administrator-architect John Sinclair. Major changes, including the removal of a whole storey and a prominent parapet wall, drastically altered the scale and design of the eventual building. The Museum's role, as monument, memorial, display space and centre for education, was to be determined and constrained by its dramatic but unconventional final form.

This book explores the complex history of the foundation and operation of the Zanzibar Museum from 1925 to 1964. (Figure 1.1) From the single but critical historical event reported in the *Gazette*, several themes emerge which will resonate throughout. The presence of migrant labourers draws our attention to the many communities resident in Zanzibar and more particularly the impact upon labour in the wake of the abolition of slavery in 1897. The dominance of an administrator-architect over the urban landscape is an important element in understanding the nature of professionalism, expertise and individual agency in a small colonial territory. The failed experiment at innovation, by altering local building materials, is just one example of the British attempts at technological modernisation. Alongside this impulse for social development was a reverence for Zanzibar as a seemingly timeless city that realised European fantasies of the Orient. Sinclair's domed building design was forged out of a desire to render

the cityscape sufficiently 'Eastern'. Such tensions between tradition and modernity would underpin debates within the Museum once it opened: this was an institution dedicated to the preservation of the past but driven by an ideological mission to improve conditions and educate local people, in particular about public health and agriculture.

Figure I.1 Opening ceremony of the Zanzibar Museum, 11 November 1925. ZNA: AV 52/28.

Discovering evidence of the collapse during construction and subsequently unearthing plans of the original building in the Zanzibar Archives has demanded an entire reassessment of the Museum. This singular building, familiar to Zanzibar's residents, tourists and researchers, and dismissed as an Orientalist fantasy, embodies complex histories of the colonial encounter. Hitherto unacknowledged documents provide evidence of the pioneering education programme and the active participation of local inhabitants. Reconstructing the experiences of its two longest-serving curators, Dr Alfred Spurrier (Figure I.3) and Ailsa Nicol Smith (Figure I.4) reveals tense professional debates over the meaning of the Museum and colonial education more generally. Within a single institution converge major strands of current interest in imperial and global history. These include concepts such as gender, race, imperial networks and the production and dissemination of knowledge, and themes as varied as architecture, film and public health. From this focus we gain a unique perspective on twentieth-century colonialism which serves to enrich and also complicate our understanding of the culture of the British Empire.

Figure I.2 John Houston Sinclair (born 1871, died 1961). Detail of ZNA: AV 4/46.

Figure I.3 Dr Alfred Henry Spurrier (born 1862, died 1935). ZNA: AV 4/21.

Figure I.4 Ailsa Nicol Smith (born 1908, died 1967). Detail of College Album 2 (1930), Newnham College Archives.

The revelation of the myriad threads running through the Museum inspired the decision to focus the book upon this single institution and interrogate thoroughly its significance within the locality and its wider meaning within the history of the British Empire. Nicholas Thomas has argued that 'only localised theories and historically specific accounts can provide much insight into the varied articulations of colonizing and counter-colonial representations and practices'.² This deep enquiry into the colonial relationships in Zanzibar through the lens of the Museum has proven especially

productive. Zanzibar, as we shall see, held a unique place in the British Empire – symbolically significant yet economically inconsequential; part of the East African Empire yet viewed as an ‘Eastern’ cultural space. But Zanzibar was also constantly in communication with the rest of the Empire and beyond. Reconstructing the nature and significance of these cultural networks forms a subtext in this book. Due to its location on the shipping route to India and South Africa, as well as long-established pre-colonial mercantile, intellectual and cultural relationships across the Indian Ocean, ideas arrived from overseas while activity in Zanzibar was influential elsewhere. Comparison with other East African museums, those elsewhere in the Empire and those in Britain, allows the significance of the Zanzibar Museum to be judged. Revealed through this are the networks that tied the global museum world together. In attending to these flows of information and objects, this book responds to the need, as explicated by Catherine Hall, Antoinette Burton, Ann Stoler, Frederick Cooper and others, to consider the metropole and periphery within the same analytical frame.³ The book looks outwards to the Empire as much as into Zanzibar.

The chronology of this investigation is particularly important in forcing us to rethink the colonial museum, in relation to both colonial and museum history. A brief historical overview is useful in making this point. The Zanzibar Museum opened in 1925, although the first recorded discussions of a museum project date back to 1907. It did not emerge out of a ‘cabinet of curiosities’ but evolved at a time when a new museum would aspire to be responsive and reach out to its public rather than serve a rarefied elite. Between 1925 to 1942, the first curator, Alfred Spurrier, and his successor, Ailsa Nicol Smith, brought their different experiences to the creation of an innovative educational institution, pioneering the use of film and outreach. Frustrations at the lack of support by the Government, in spite of praise from the Colonial Office, led to Nicol Smith’s resignation in 1942. Due to financial constraints, a hiatus of 14 years ensued before a full-time curator could be re-appointed. Cecil Thompson took on the reconfigured role of Archivist-Curator in 1956, tasked with not only overseeing the Museum but also combining the Museum’s manuscript collection with Government documents to create the first Government Archives. This new institution opened days after the Zanzibar Revolution in 1964, thus allowing the whole colonial period in Zanzibar in the twentieth century to be investigated through the Museum’s story.

Museums in East Africa remain surprisingly absent in the literature on colonial museums, yet the timing of their construction is significant. The Zanzibar Museum is only discussed briefly in two

publications, both of which relate to contemporary heritage projects: one by the archaeologist, Mark Horton, the other by Abdul Sheriff, historian of Zanzibar and former curator of the National Museum.⁴ These short accounts, analysed further in [Chapter 4](#), were designed to highlight the need to reorganise museums in the post-colonial era. More broadly, studies of colonial museums focus upon the nineteenth-century institutions in settler colonies or India. East African museums in Uganda and Kenya evolved in the 1900s out of local natural history societies but were late to share Zanzibar's mission of 'native' education. These initiatives catered to the settler and European residents. The delayed development of the museum in Zanzibar shifted its emphasis towards the education of the local population. In German East Africa, plans for setting up a museum were underway in 1912, but the proposed location – the residence of the deputy-governor – was required by German officials in 1914 after the Royal Navy destroyed the Governor's home.⁵ Not until 1939 was a public museum created in what was by then the British territory of Tanganyika based closely on the model of the Zanzibar Museum. Globally, professionalism in the curatorial sphere was improving in the first half of the twentieth century, and an active museum network shared practice and ideas around the world. Museums in West Africa grew mainly out of post-Second World War development projects, and they thus represent a subsequent stage.⁶ It is possible to see the Zanzibar Museum as pioneering a new phase in colonial museum development in the interwar period – the significance of which was acknowledged at the time by the Colonial Office.

In the colonial context, the heyday of the Museum, from 1925 to 1942 under Spurrier and Nicol Smith, coincided with new priorities of 'native development' and education expounded by the Colonial Office. The Museum was at the forefront of this work. Andrew Roberts has described the period from 1900 to 1945 as a 'Colonial Moment' in African history.⁷ Generally considered at his time of writing as 'a mere interlude', this was in fact a period of great activity and transformation in East Africa.⁸ The history of the Zanzibar Museum bears witness to a wide variety of these changes, including technological advancement and education. The 1920s were a time of reckoning in Zanzibar: it was no longer 'the island metropolis of East Africa' as Tanganyika and Kenya were colonies with much more economic potential.⁹ The Zanzibar Government therefore asserted Zanzibar's identity by celebrating its long history and cosmopolitan Swahili culture, a marked shift from the nineteenth century, when the 'hybrid' community was an object of racial denigration.¹⁰ This historical narrative, itself inspired by local concepts of Swahili coastal exceptionalism, was disseminated through the Museum and its

associated publications throughout the islands and the region.

Museums are peculiar cultural entities. Their function as a repository and space for exhibiting objects and specimens forms only one part of the story. While museums are apparently institutions devoted to order, classification and intellectual authority, close examination of their archives reveals states of tension, disagreement and disorder. Transposed to the colonial setting, such fractures in their existence as purveyors of knowledge further exemplify the fragility of the colonial state. Central to this particular study is the museum as a site where decisions were made, debates were played out and experiments were undertaken. What did not happen, what failed and why ideas were rejected are often as revealing, if not more so, than the resultant displays. Sharon MacDonald's ethnographic investigation into the creation of an exhibition at the Science Museum makes this point abundantly clear. Research into museums must go beyond the displays to reveal 'the nature and complexities of production: of the disjunctions, disagreements and "surprise outcomes" involved in cultural production'.¹¹ The exhibit as realised is most often the result of compromise, where practical and financial limitations trump ideological clarity.

We are fortunate in the case of the Zanzibar Museum that the curators engaged in lengthy correspondence with the Museum Committee and the Government; thus we are able to reconstruct the essence of these deliberations. The issues discussed included education, public health, the role of local women and representation of ethnic identities. A unique view into the colonial world is therefore contained within this Museum's archive – an archive which itself was the location for much of this research and also the subject, created as it was from the Museum collection in the dying years of colonialism. This book, while addressing key themes in colonial history, also highlights central questions of how and why historical evidence exists – both material and textual, how has history acted upon the evidence we work with and how scholars can work productively within the dynamic state of construction, destruction, absence and presence of our source material.¹²

Museums, hegemony and the production of colonial knowledge

The Lahore Museum looms large over the narrative in Rudyard Kipling's classic novel of empire, *Kim*. In his discussion of the text, Thomas Richards notes: 'the crystallized image of comprehensive knowledge upon which English hegemony rests is the museum'.¹³

Through their often striking exterior facades and orderly cabinets, categorised objects and learned curators, museums in the colonial world gave the impression of such a hegemonic power over knowledge and local populations. Buildings containing objects from past eras conveyed a sense of stability, as well as asserting the British right to construct this historical narrative, thus claiming legitimacy and authority. For this reason, they are potent sites to use in examining and questioning the acquisition, organisation and deployment of colonial knowledge.

Investigating the relationship between museums and power has been central to literature on the history of museums. The works of Tony Bennett and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill have been particularly influential in applying the work of Michel Foucault and other cultural theorists in order to configure the nineteenth-century museum as a site of discipline and control. Hooper-Greenhill investigates the meaning of the museum in a 'disciplinary society', a concept developed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.¹⁴ She interprets the disciplinary society as operating 'through technologies that survey, classify and control time, space, bodies and things'.¹⁵ In the example of Revolutionary France, she regards the museum as a 'crucial instrument' which 'enabled the construction of a new set of values'.¹⁶ In *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* she uses this model to describe how public museums became a means of 'civilising' their populations.¹⁷ Tony Bennett used Foucault's and Hooper-Greenhill's ideas to inform his model of the 'exhibitionary complex', which regards the museum as one of a set of public institutions which created self-regulating public spaces, where people were both observing and being observed.¹⁸ Naturally, such propositions, which focus upon the exertion and entrenchment of power relationships, lend themselves to studies of museums in the colonial world, where regulation of society and importation of 'civilisation' were amongst the espoused ambitions of British rule. Bennett's recent project on 'Museum, Field, Metropolis, Colony' has examined the relationship between social governance and collecting, museum practice and the development of anthropology.¹⁹ This study of the Zanzibar Museum provides new evidence of the actual practice of 'museum-making' in the twentieth-century colonial world and its precarious relationship with governmentality and the exercise of power.

The control of indigenous peoples and exploitation of territory was an exercise in governance. To realise this on the ground, political, judicial and administrative activities necessitated research into local customs and culture. Bernard Cohn included museums as 'investigative modalities', his term for the collection of a body of information, its classification and its transformation into useable

forms.²⁰ In *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Cohn placed museums alongside the census, cartography, surveillance and photography as central to the documentation project undertaken by the British in nineteenth-century India. Such knowledge informed administration, for example, how to govern through local political structures and the codification of pre-colonial legal systems. Material culture was acquired in the process of administration in a variety of ways. In some cases, artefacts were collected during surveying trips, and were subsequently offered to museums. In other examples, officers collected while undertaking duties, whether through seizure, purchase or as gifts. Such collections arrived in museums established in the Empire where they were categorised and arranged according to Western systems of the structure of knowledge of the human and natural world. In this regard, therefore, museums were intimately tied with the exercise of power both in the formation of their collections and their symbolic value. The Saidean model of knowledge production as a form of power, bounded by a series of underlying dichotomies between coloniser and colonised, has provided the benchmark by which we consider colonial relationships and cultural productions.²¹

Though these influential works drew attention to the significance of museums in the Empire, I would argue that Cohn's conflation of museums with these other forms of documentation misconstrues the colonial museum. There was no centrally endorsed 'imperial museum project'. This is not to say that their curators, on the whole Europeans, did not share a belief in museums as part of the 'civilising mission'. But grouping museums with other projects such as the census or maps misunderstands the particular and peculiar workings of a museum in such diverse geographical and temporal contexts. As MacKenzie has shown in *Museums and Empire*, museums were formed in a haphazard and imperfect fashion, sometimes by maverick officers or isolated collectors.²² Many museums did not survive and were as ephemeral as exhibitions. Gyan Prakash argues that colonialism itself is responsible for this misrepresentation of exhibitions and museums: 'So pervasive and enduring is colonialism's triumphant self-description of its own career that we frequently fail to identify its subterfuges, paradoxes, distortions and failures that punctuated its exercise of power'.²³ These paradoxes and failures, so apparent in museums throughout Britain and the Empire, merit much closer scrutiny. As Kate Hill illustrates, the exercise of authoritative power and discipline by Britain's regional museums in the nineteenth century was fragmented and contested.²⁴ In the case of the Zanzibar Museum, the reasons behind the Museum's fragile existence, the debates behind the scenes and the failed ventures attest to the lack of coherence in the function of the

twentieth-century colonial state.²⁵

The aim in this book is to demonstrate that we need to reconsider our models of vertical power relationships to understand the museum in the non-settler colonial world. The case of Zanzibar is particularly useful in this regard for several reasons. Its ruling elite comprised Arab, Indian and European communities. British formal annexation and share in government, when Zanzibar was established as a Protectorate in 1890, followed over 100 years of rule by Oman. Thus colonialism on the island predated British intervention. New work on concepts on the historical roots of race and identity in Zanzibar by Jonathan Glassman forces us to recognise the local origins of the historical narrative disseminated in the Museum.²⁶ Material culture and its display had a long history within Swahili culture on the East African coast with its own particular logics and meanings, as Prita Meier has so clearly demonstrated.²⁷ Such models were adopted and adapted by British residents. Local agency – in the form of donors, researchers and staff – and the integral role of intermediaries contradict many of the assumptions regularly made about the colonial museum and collecting practice. Here the model of the ‘relational museum’ as presented by Chris Gosden and Frances Larson is relevant in their mapping of the vast reach of museum communities.²⁸ The essays in Julie Codell and Dianne Macleod’s volume, *Orientalism Transposed*, reveal the ‘vast cacophony of multiple voices and intentions’ in the enunciations between colonised and coloniser in cultural projects.²⁹ Like translators and colonial servants explored elsewhere in Africa and India, the local members of the Museum community in Zanzibar critically enabled and influenced the production of knowledge.³⁰

One of the most important arguments in this book is the negative influence of the Zanzibar Government in the history of the Zanzibar Museum. Not only is the dichotomy between ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’ called into question, but also the idea of a single, homogeneous mission by the British. The essays in Bickers’ *Settlers and Expatriates* demonstrate the fractured and heterogeneous world of the ‘coloniser’.³¹ It was for this reason that claims for cultural hegemony as exerted through the Museum must be seriously called into question. In the straitened economic times of the 1940s, the role the Museum had carved out for itself as a centre for education in public health and agriculture was thwarted by Government scepticism and a lack of support. The curators instead continued to work with local staff and enthusiasts from all backgrounds to maintain the Museum, responding to the local people’s interests, as they continued to visit regularly in large numbers throughout the period in question. The Museum, rather than acting as a dominant symbol of British authority, was in fact

undermined by the British themselves.

Modes of investigation in the Museum's history

The history of a museum in a British colonial territory is necessarily located at the intersection of a variety of disciplines. During the last three decades, a rich vein of literature has appeared which explores the relationship between colonialism and culture, including material culture, museums, exhibitions, the visual image and architecture.³² Such work has been integral in bringing the study of culture to the forefront of the 'new imperial history'.³³ Realising the full potential of the Zanzibar Museum as a site for enquiry has necessitated a similarly interdisciplinary approach, drawing on material, architectural, photographic and textual sources.³⁴ Like the sherds unearthed in an archaeological site, the evidence is fragmentary, elusive and incomplete. There are both silent figures and those whose archival presence makes them 'loud' – one must be wary of privileging those whose actions are recorded in more detail. The unevenness of the evidence and the random survival of material mean that each document has to be mined discerningly. My focus throughout has been what these sources reveal about the meaning of the Museum and knowledge production 'on the ground' as a colonial institution.³⁵ In this quest I have been driven by my own decade-long experience of working in museums and galleries. Much of what I read in the administrative records of the Zanzibar Museum chimes with my own experiences in a way that many of the more theoretical museum studies do not. This book therefore aims to fill a gap within these studies, by investigating the meaning of these everyday realities of museum life and their relevance within the context of colonial history.

The Zanzibar Archives hold the majority of the administrative records of the Museum in the colonial period, although, as [Chapter 6](#) will demonstrate, these are likely to be incomplete. The archive is not a neutral, unmediated collection of documents but, as Richards has shown, it is itself a 'technology' of empire.³⁶ While remaining mindful of these omissions and the need to read the archive 'against the grain', I have also, through a study of the construction of the Archive, attempted to historicise the presence or absence of such source material. Such absences are tantalising: in the case of Dr Spurrier, a prolific correspondent, his papers in the Zanzibar Archives contain only the letters he received. We learn also of the occasional decisions to destroy sets of Government papers.

Supplementary archival material in UK repositories has filled some gaps, partly with administrative duplicates but also with the personal papers of individuals. The richest sources are often the most

subjective. The *Zanzibar Gazette* is a prime example. It was the first weekly newspaper in East Africa, established in 1892, initially as a commercial venture, then as a Government publication from 1894.³⁷ Alongside international, shipping and commercial reports, two or three columns entitled 'Local News' published stories of local interest, commentary articles and details of the social activities of the Europeans and members of all the elite communities. The *Gazette* has yielded much relevant and rich material to build up a picture of the cultural activities in the Protectorate and developments in the Museum. Yet the prominence of the Museum's activities in the *Gazette* reports cannot be taken necessarily as evidence of wider interest. Several of its editors were also involved in the Museum: Dr Spurrier, the first curator, was an editor for many years from 1895, and took on the role sporadically in the 1920s. W. H. Ingrams and R. H. Crofton, enthusiastic early supporters of the Museum, both contributed articles to the *Gazette*, and Ingrams also acted as its editor in the mid-1920s around the time of the opening of the Museum. This indicates the presence of a group of academically inclined officers who found an outlet for their amateur curatorial or journalistic talents in both the *Gazette* and the Museum. We are fortunate though, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s when Museum reports were irregular or have not survived, that they chose to record the Museum's achievements, changes in displays and exhibitions in this way, based on insider knowledge.

The works of travel writers to Zanzibar from the early 1900s provided important material for the first chapter in considering the European perception of Zanzibar. From 1925, several writers described their visits to the Museum. Travel writers naturally have their own agenda, addressing their typically British audience. Depending on their approach, they might perpetuate or deconstruct stereotypes, especially about the East. Their insights are nonetheless useful as they reflect contemporary sensibilities and draw comparisons to other colonial contexts. The most recognised of these writers was Evelyn Waugh, who recorded his visit to the Zanzibar Museum and meeting with Dr Spurrier in *Remote People*, published in 1931, during his travels to Abyssinia, Aden, Kenya, the Belgian Congo and South Africa. *Black Mischief*, his controversial novel of 1932 recounting the attempted modernisation of a fictional East African state, was based on these experiences. Responding to criticism that he satirised King Haile Selassie in this novel, Waugh wrote in the preface to the 1962 edition that, if there was any model for the country in *Black Mischief*, it was Zanzibar. Certainly the Emperor of Azania's description of his vision of a museum bears a strong resemblance to the Zanzibar Museum of the late 1920s. It is therefore appropriate to

incorporate judiciously some quotations from this novel.

A key source for this book has been the Zanzibar Museum itself. Exploring the Museum building, at that time closed to the public, permitted close analysis of its construction, architecture, size and use of space. Several offices still contained jettisoned objects from the colonial period.³⁸ In these dusty rooms, I discovered old displays, labels and a painted portrait of John Sinclair. Its remaining collections have been redisplayed in the Beit al Ajaib (or House of Wonders) and Palace Museums on the seafront in Stone Town. The card catalogue created by Ailsa Nicol Smith in 1939 still remains in the offices. These material remnants assisted with the reconstruction of the image of the Museum and history of the objects, and their contemporary display in the House of Wonders prompted intellectual questions over their significance in the twenty-first century, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

Photographic evidence located in these various archives has been vital in capturing images of both specific displays and objects, as well as creating a wider understanding of social life and status in the colonial Zanzibar. A series of recently identified photographs in the British Museum pictorial collections showing the Zanzibar Museum displays from 1926–7 discloses vital unrecorded details to complement the contemporaneous written guides to the Museum. Photographs are themselves ‘windows’ onto this period, though they are naturally limited in their gaze.³⁹ Up until this point they have been used mostly by scholars as illustrations rather than the subject of in-depth analysis. Photographs will be discussed individually, although there are a few general points that should be made at the outset. It is important to note that the principal photographic companies in Zanzibar, whose images document the colonial period, were established families of Goan origin, immigrants during the nineteenth century. Gomes & Son and Countinho Brothers dominated this business from the late 1890s onwards and were members of the sizeable Indian professional class. They provided an essential role in recording and capturing the British imperial experience in both informal and formal photographs. Copies of these same images feature repeatedly in the albums of many individuals. These photographers became participants in the Museum as they were commissioned to take images specifically for display.

The location of the images is often significant. Those found in personal albums were collected for an officer’s individual memories. That of Alexander Stuart Rogers, examined in [Chapter 1](#), is a carefully pieced-together montage of selected splendid events he oversaw, creating an image that is at odds with his administrative record as Regent and First Minister. I have been able to confirm that several of

these unlabelled photographs are of the Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905. The series of photographs in the British Museum were delivered by Crofton to T. A. Joyce, then deputy keeper of the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography, seeking advice on museum display and case design.⁴⁰ On the other hand, images of the Museum in use, commissioned by Nicol Smith around 1940, were taken with a particular purpose and message to convey as she published them in the *Museums Journal* at a time when her role and the Museum were under threat. The Zanzibar Archives have a rich and important collection of images though these are only visible in digital format with no record of the text written alongside or on the back of the image. In spite of repeated requests, I was unable to see the originals; therefore, where possible, I have used other sources to deduce the precise occasion on which they were taken.

Histories of Zanzibar

A museum has multivalent relationships with history. At the most fundamental level, the role of many museums is to preserve objects from the past. These objects then may be displayed to narrate a version of history to visitors. These exhibits themselves are a form of historiography, reflecting the perception of history by the constituency that created the display at a particular moment in time. As Annie Coombes observes, analysing the historical narrative of a museum tells us as much, if not more, about those who made them than about the history they purport to tell.⁴¹ As we have seen in the case of colonial museums, the overriding assumption is that this is the story of the coloniser controlling not just the present of the colonised territory but also the past, by collecting and categorising objects and re-telling its history. In the case of Zanzibar, as we shall see, histories were not only shaped by a varied community of participants but also built upon a pre-existing, and indigenous, conception of the islands' history. Ideas about Zanzibar's history and landscape informed the design of the building of the Museum. The political, social and economic context of the era in which the Museum was created – the 1920s – heavily influenced its mission. Interpreting Zanzibar's past was a potentially contentious act, illustrated by the fact that after the bloody revolution of 1964, one of President Karume's earliest policies was to ban the teaching of history in Zanzibar's schools.⁴²

Glassman's reassessment of the use of history in emergent Zanzibari nationalist discourse has enabled a much more nuanced interpretation of the Zanzibar Museum's display to emerge.⁴³ He has shown that notions of race and ethnicity, which nationalists during and after the colonial period attributed to British practices of 'divide and rule', had

a long history in pre-colonial Zanzibar.⁴⁴ There is no doubt that ethnic and racial categories were institutionalised, manipulated and politicised during the British period. However, Glassman seeks to demonstrate that markers and claims to identity along ethnic and racial lines had existed on the islands for centuries amongst the Swahili. A consistent theme was the desirability of an identity with an explicit connection to external places – Persia and Arabia in particular. This led to the creation of an overarching historical structure that positioned Zanzibar as the recipient of waves of migration of more cultivated ‘others’. Such a perspective naturally suited Arab scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and British administrators writing their histories of Zanzibar. They perpetuated this pre-existing conceptualisation of the islands’ history.⁴⁵ Glassman also highlights the importance of the generation of Arab intellectuals and teachers who were trained under L. W. Hollingsworth in the new Teacher Training School from 1923. This group reciprocally influenced Hollingsworth and W. H. Ingrams in their research into, and publications about, the history of Zanzibar. This book brings important new evidence to light to build on Glassman’s work by examining how the Museum gave this historical interpretation physical form. It is therefore possible to reposition the Museum’s historical narrative as one that was informed by a locally created concept of history, rather than dictating it.

In order to untangle these intersecting ideas of history and to reveal how the Museum was influenced by, and itself influenced, constructions of the past, it is necessary to outline the broader history of Zanzibar and some of the key historiographical interpretations.

Pre-Protectorate History

The history of Zanzibar can be best understood by considering its participation in Indian Ocean trading networks. People, objects and ideas had circulated through this oceanic space for millennia. The earliest references to the island in western literature are found in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which describes a vast network of trade and commerce around the Indian Ocean.⁴⁶ The island of Men(o)uthias mentioned in this Greek guide to navigation and trading opportunities has been identified with Unguja.⁴⁷ The twice-yearly monsoon winds enabled traders from the Indian Ocean rim to circulate and exchange their goods, laying the foundations of the islands’ cosmopolitan coastal culture. This sophisticated mercantile population, which would become known as the Swahili, developed along the East African coast. Islam gradually became established as the dominant coastal religion with waves of immigrants from Arabia and the Persian Gulf.⁴⁸

Archaeological finds and ruins of sizeable towns along the coast testify to the prosperity and extent of the Swahili city-states. The development of this network of Swahili coastal states was known for much of the period in question as the 'Zenj Empire', tying its development closely to influence from Arabia, through the arrival of the fabled 'Shirazi' princes from Persia. Archaeological research in the post-colonial era has uncovered evidence from the first millennia of trading towns on the coast established by Bantu- and Cushitic-speaking communities settling on the coast.⁴⁹ With the spread and consolidation of Islam from the eleventh century, these settlements developed a common Swahili cultural and linguistic base, with significant towns, such as Kilwa Kisiwani, emerging as dominant trading posts.

The arrival of the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century reoriented power relations on the coast, and the next 200 years were characterised by struggles between the Portuguese and the Omani Imamate. Rulers of Swahili coastal states attempted to play these two powers off against one another, rarely with sustained success.⁵⁰ During the eighteenth century, a dominant Omani commercial empire began to emerge along the coast. Until the nineteenth century, Zanzibar was primarily a point of exchange for goods from the Indian Ocean and the mainland African continent, including slaves, ivory and beads, rather than a significant producer of goods itself.

When Seyyid Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi acceded to the Omani Imamate in the 1800s, much of the East African coastline as well as the Omani peninsula lay under his control. Seyyid Said has been credited by his contemporaries and historians with the spectacular rise in Zanzibar's fortunes in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ His achievements were later to be memorialised in the Zanzibar Museum. Under his guidance, the island grew from one of many Indian Ocean trading conduits to become the dominant commercial hub. He transferred the capital of his vast trading state from Muscat to Zanzibar in the 1830s and 1840s, cementing its pivotal position. His encouragement was critical in the expansion of clove cultivation, which flourished in the tropical climate. He strategically engaged in various diplomatic treaties with the consuls from Europe and the United States, who established consulates in Zanzibar Town from the 1820s.⁵² Cloves, ivory and slaves were commodities in great demand in the nineteenth century, and Zanzibar, well positioned through Seyyid Said's strategic and diplomatic prowess, became the nexus of these trades.⁵³

A large number of ambitious Omani landlords seized the opportunity to establish clove plantations on the islands, cultivated by slave labour. They contributed architecturally, adding to the existing

pre-Omani stone buildings on the Shangani peninsula with the construction of large palaces, creating the 'Stone Town'.⁵⁴ In their wake came Indian merchants and financiers to service the burgeoning commercial activity.⁵⁵ These immigrants from South Asia also made their cultural and architectural mark. For six months every year, the town's population increased and diversified as dhows arrived carrying merchants and their cargo from the north-east and the Persian Gulf. The arrival of varied peoples from around the Indian Ocean in traditional boats of the same design as those used for hundreds of years was described by Ingrams in the 1930s as akin to viewing a 'pageant of history'.⁵⁶ In the nineteenth century, Zanzibar Town grew considerably in size, and was famous for its imposing palatial architecture, its slave market and diverse population from across the Indian Ocean (Figure I.5).

British interest in the region grew in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, governed by the necessity of safeguarding her trade routes to India and ensuring that the Persian Gulf remained a viable market for British Indian commercial activity.⁵⁷ Maintaining a peaceful Indian Ocean was in Britain's best interests.⁵⁸ Suppression of the slave trade began in earnest across the British Empire after 1833, although both the British and the Omani rulers were reluctant to act rapidly, aware that Zanzibar's prosperity and thus the stability of the Indian Ocean were dependent upon slavery. Seyyid Said's son Barghash, a fiery and charismatic character, finally signed a treaty in 1873 to outlaw the trade in slaves in the territories he governed in the Indian Ocean and on the mainland. The notorious slave market in Zanzibar Town was closed and a Universities' Mission to Central Africa cathedral was built on its site by Bishop Steere. The close relationship between Britain and Sultan Barghash over the question of abolition in the 1870s augmented British leverage in the Sultan's government.⁵⁹ The practice of slavery was not outlawed in Zanzibar until 1897.⁶⁰

Figure I.5 Map of Zanzibar Town highlighting major public and government buildings in the colonial period. Based on the endpapers of R. H. Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs, 1914–1933* (London: Francis Edwards Ltd, 1953).

On a personal level, links between the British and the Arab elites became ever closer. Sultan Barghash accompanied British Consul, Sir John Kirk to London in 1875 to ratify the treaty abolishing the slave trade. Royal Navy ships regularly docked in the port of Zanzibar in their anti-slave missions. Upon Kirk's advice, Barghash created a European-style army, trained by a British naval officer, Lt Lloyd Mathews, who came to have substantial influence upon the history of Zanzibar. In 1881 Mathews retired from the British Navy to take up

an appointment by the Sultan as ‘Brigadier-General’ of Zanzibar, and subsequently developed ‘absolute mastery over the Arab population’.⁶¹ ‘Bwana Mkubwa’, literally ‘great master’ in kiSwahili, was the name by which he was known to ‘thousands of natives in remote parts of the islands’.⁶² These relationships became highly significant when strategic concerns, encompassed in the European ‘Scramble for Africa’, trumped Foreign Office reticence to intervention in the region and led to Zanzibar’s formal annexation as a British Protectorate in 1890.⁶³

Establishing Zanzibar as a British Protectorate

The administration of Zanzibar as a British Protectorate had two distinct two phases, throughout which the Sultan remained head of the state, supported by a British administrative apparatus. The particular nature of the form of indirect rule on the island during these periods – the Foreign Office phase and the Colonial Office phase – will be discussed in the next two sections. In brief, from 1890 to 1913 the Sultan’s Government, staffed largely by European officers, existed alongside the British Consulate, administered through the Foreign Office. In 1913, a single Zanzibar Government was established, headed by a British Resident, and administration in London shifted to the Colonial Office. The High Commissionership of the islands was held by the Governor of British East Africa based in Nairobi. This system created a bureaucratic burden and lack of independence for the Zanzibar Government leading to the abolition of the High Commissionership in 1925. Zanzibar was administered through the Colonial Office until independence was granted in 1963.

The nature of British rule of the Protectorate is critical to understanding the Museum’s foundation. The representation of the Sultan and history of the Sultanate was a vital component of the Protectorate’s governance. The particular structure of colonial government as realised in Zanzibar shaped the way British officials governed the islands and interacted with their inhabitants. This in turn had important ramifications for how they collected information and the mode in which they chose to display it in the Museum. Simultaneously, the diminishing importance of Zanzibar, due to the rise of British territories on the East African mainland, compelled its officials to assert its cultural and historical superiority. The Museum was an important facet of this project. All its aspects – architecture, collections and educational activities – were framed within, and responded, to this form of government.

Lord Hailey, in his survey of *Native Administration in the British African Territories* written in the 1950s, described the varying degrees

of control in different regions within the East African possessions. Several of these territories were part of the 'informal empire', a term John Darwin defines as rule through indigenous forms of government, often relying on links made by trade, investment or diplomacy.⁶⁴ By its very nature the 'informal empire' was made up, in the words of Robinson and Gallagher, of 'many different kinds of empire' whose form developed according to circumstances, including economic opportunity, strategic necessity and the level of local cooperation or resistance.⁶⁵ Darwin describes these as 'bridgeheads', which could be 'a commercial, settler, missionary or proconsular presence, or a combination of all four'.⁶⁶ So specific was the form of rule in Zanzibar that Hailey felt he had to qualify its inclusion in his survey: 'Though there is not here any system of Native Administration comparable to that existing in the neighbouring British territories in East Africa, the Zanzibar Protectorate has been included in the present survey partly because of its general interest for students of Colonial affairs and because of the special interest in the method adopted by the Arab State in dealing with the African and other communities included in its population'.⁶⁷ Zanzibar's complicated ethnic hierarchies particularly attracted Hailey's attention.

The Zanzibar Protectorate administration evolved largely in response to historical circumstances, tied closely to the interests of incumbent individuals. In essence, the Protectorate system formalised the existing control the British exerted over the Sultan. Hailey summarised it as 'an Arab State with an Arab sovereign, under the protection of the British Government'.⁶⁸ While the structure of the executive was 'clearly intended to pay regard to the tradition of the sovereignty of the Sultan', Hailey found that the system of rule was one 'in which concession, agreement and usage have given the British Government a marked ascendancy'.⁶⁹ Anthony Low, in his typology of the variants in British imperial rule, placed Zanzibar amongst those territories where British intervention was at its most direct.⁷⁰ As such, the system of rule in Zanzibar is most readily comparable to those of the princely states in India.⁷¹ Glassman has described it as 'dual colonialism' and Antony Clayton as 'sub-imperialism', where the British ruled over what remained an Arab imperial structure.⁷²

Foreign Office Phase: 1890–1913

In the first incarnation of Protectorate rule from 1890 to 1913, the Sultan remained the ruler, with a British Vizier or First Minister to advise him. European officers were placed in positions of authority within the Sultan's Government. The British Consul and Agent had a small staff and oversaw foreign policy. This form of 'dual control'

functioned satisfactorily when the officers were familiar with the territory and well established in the community, as they were in the 1890s.⁷³ Existing local systems were retained. For example, the Liwalis, Arab governors of districts, were deemed 'to have great influence' and were 'of great help'.⁷⁴ One officer commented on a proposal to remove the Liwalis: 'I do not think we should let it appear that we want to oust the Arab for the European, rather to show that we want to help and strengthen the Liwali by a firmer form of Government'.⁷⁵ By ruling through the existing system – itself in essence an Arab empire over the island's population, the British were able to control Zanzibar's political, military and fiscal affairs with only a small number of colonial officers.

The Sultan theoretically nominated his successors. Any delusions of independence in this decision were forcefully demonstrated in 1896, when Sultan Khalid bin Barghash acceded to the throne. His resistance to British domination led to the only military intervention by the British against the Sultanate. After 37 minutes of intense British bombardment from the sea, on 27 August 1896, Sultan Khalid surrendered, leaving much of his seafront palace in ruins.⁷⁶ The British asserted their dominance over dynastic affairs to ensure the succession of their favoured nominee, Hamud bin Muhammad.

Significant weaknesses, revealed in the 1900s, existed in the system of 'dual control' and these will be examined in detail in [Chapter 1](#). In particular, the young Sultan Ali bin Hamud, who attained his majority in 1905, proved a difficult partner. The succession of First Ministers failed to control Sultan Ali as the British Consul and Government had hoped. The situation was exacerbated by tense relations between successive First Ministers and British Consuls. Basil Cave, Consul from 1904 to 1908, and his successor, Edward Clarke, in post 1909–1913, became increasingly frustrated by the system, which they believed limited effective British intervention in the islands' government. Sultan Ali resigned in 1911, preferring to lead a life in Europe. He was succeeded by Sultan Khalifa bin Harub, whom the British found to be much more amenable. Clarke's untimely death in 1913 provided the opportunity to overhaul the administrative system.

Colonial Office Phase: 1913–1963

With the transfer of administration from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, the posts of First Minister and British Agent and Consul were amalgamated to create the position of British Resident, reporting to the High Commissioner of Zanzibar, a post given to the Governor of British East Africa. The Sultan headed the Protectorate Council with the British Resident as Vice-Chairman.⁷⁷ Other members

were the Attorney-General, the Chief Secretary and the Financial Secretary. In addition, there were four nominated members from the Arab and Indian communities.

The Colonial Office phase coincided with the advent of the Great War, an event which began dramatically in Zanzibar. The German vessel, the *Königsberg*, fired on and sank HMS *Pegasus* in the waters near to Zanzibar Town on 20 September 1914. No other military activity occurred on the island although fighting between British and German colonies on the mainland brought armies requiring resources and medical treatment. The most important effect of the war upon Zanzibar was the incorporation of Tanganyika into the British Empire as part of the peace settlement. This united British control of the coastline and Zanzibar's strategic role in the Empire diminished still further. In the context of this study, Clarke's death and the war put plans he had instigated for a museum on hold. The end of the war provided the opportunity to create a war memorial to act as a museum, fulfilling several civic and imperial duties.

Emphasis in imperial policy upon trusteeship and responsibility of peoples of subject territories gained currency in the 1920s. The Protectorate Council was reconfigured as the Executive Council and the Legislative Council in 1926. This apparently more representative form of Government involved formal representation from the Arab and Indian communities who could be nominated as ex-officio members. The first 'African' member was not elected until 1946. Writing in the 1950s, the former administrator and architect John Sinclair believed that 'there was no class feeling nor any great movement for self-government beyond that already afforded by the representation of the Arabs and Asians on the Legislative Council, established since my time'.⁷⁸ The closed bubble of British administration and Arab and Indian elite society presented the illusion of stability. In fact, the associations of different island communities expanded in the 1930s and 1940s.

Members of the Colonial Office in the late 1920s fostered concerns about Zanzibar's economy.⁷⁹ The clove industry – vulnerable to the success of the harvest and global demand – remained the principal source of finance for the Government. Modernisation programmes, such as the expansion of the harbour and the road-building programme of the late 1920s and 1930s, were intended to facilitate the clove manufacturing and trading process.⁸⁰ The Agricultural Department undertook research at the Kizimbani Research Station to seek alternative mineral and agricultural resources to reduce dependency upon the clove industry, though with limited success.⁸¹ Interventions by Government were taken in the 1930s to combat the impact of the Depression, including the creation in 1934 of the Clove

Growers Association to support the interests of the Arab plantation owners by reducing production and labour costs.⁸² Support of one group antagonised others and led to Indian financiers organising a boycott of the sale of Zanzibar cloves in India.⁸³ This situation was resolved through an uneasy compromise; the averted crisis made the interdependence of colonial economies abundantly clear.

As we shall see in [Chapter 5](#), British education policy in Zanzibar had been slow to develop; they struggled to create a school system acceptable to the island's varied communities. Roman Loimeier's meticulous survey of Islamic education in Zanzibar places the British colonial educational phase within the much longer history of Zanzibar's Islamic scholarship.⁸⁴ The period of greatest activity by the British took place during the interwar years, with the creation of a teacher training school and girls' schools. A greater emphasis was also laid upon the welfare of the islands' poorer communities. This took hold after 1940 following the Colonial Welfare and Development Act and an increase in available funds. The Second World War did not affect Zanzibar in terms of military action and it actually benefitted in some respects, for example, the demand for coir rope to be used for camouflage netting led to a great boost in this industry.⁸⁵

After the Second World War, further financial aid was acquired for Zanzibar from the Colonial Development Fund for welfare and education.⁸⁶ Modernisation projects included the construction of a large 'native' hospital and the airport. Gradually the British permitted further representation by members of 'African' communities in the administration and on the administrative councils, though members of the minority Arab and Indian communities still held on to the monopoly at higher levels of government.⁸⁷ Communal associations formed the basis of political parties, which therefore aligned political representation with ethnicity and race. Intense debates characterised the nationalist electoral campaigns from 1957 to 1963, a period known as 'Zama za Siasa', the 'Time of Politics', which as Glassman has demonstrated, saw aspirant politicians using various interpretations of Zanzibar's past to gain popular support.⁸⁸ The Arab-dominated Zanzibar Nationalist Party won the majority of seats in the first election of the independent era in 1963 in spite of winning a minority of the vote. This government was ousted a year later and the Sultanate deposed in the revolution of March 1964. The Afro-Shirazi Party took power and formed the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar led by Abeid Karume. It was at this point that President Karume banned history teaching in schools, such was the volatility of interpreting Zanzibar's past.⁸⁹

Ethnic Communities in Colonial Zanzibar

While Zanzibar's many and varied communities have been mentioned regularly, it is worth examining these groups more carefully. For the purposes of administration, the British Government treated the communities as 'Arabs', 'Indians' and 'Africans', groups which were broadly considered respectively to be landowners; merchants and financiers; and labourers or subsistence farmers. In terms of its population, numbers were not systematically collected until the 1920s. In 1901, Basil Cave, the Consul General, reported that an estimate by Sir Lloyd Mathews in 1895 placed the total population of the islands at 208,700, though Mathews himself confessed to being poor with figures.⁹⁰ Linda Leigh, writing the first visitors' guide to Zanzibar in 1901, gave the population as 30,000 in the town and 150,000 on Unguja.⁹¹ She described the European population as made up of approximately 100 Englishmen, 40 Germans and a small number of Americans, Frenchmen, Italians, Greeks and 'Roumanians'. There were 7,000 British Indian subjects 'through whose hands almost the whole trade of Zanzibar and East Africa passes, directly or indirectly'.⁹²

The first census took place in 1910, though it was far from rigorous in its methods, and gave an approximate population of 197,000 on the islands (114,000 in Unguja, 83,000 in Pemba) which included 121 Europeans, 18,000 Arabs and 9,000 'non-natives', mainly South Asians.⁹³ Over the period in question, the number of Arabs and South Asians remained fairly constant but the number of 'Africans' steadily rose. A significant increase can be seen in the number of British administrators: the Staff of the British Consulate increased from only four in 1891 to 34 in 1912.⁹⁴ This number continued to rise after transferral to the Colonial Office as the administration grew in size and expanded its range of expertise. The European, Indian and Arab populations were concentrated in Zanzibar Town and the urban 'African' population largely resided in Ng'ambo. It is misleading to think of these demarcations as rigid, as the British colonial officers were prone to do; they are only broadly indicative of settlement patterns.

While census reports and administrative documents show the British were aware of the diversity within their four categories, this model continued to define their perception of Zanzibar's society. The real situation was far more complicated. Every category – Arab, Indian, African and indeed European – comprised people of wide-ranging economic and social situations. Evidence for this can be seen in the creation of communal associations from the early twentieth century onwards. By the 1930s, these had divided and subdivided into

over 23 different ethnic and communal associations, such as the diverse range of interest groups.⁹⁵

The term Arab was used by those descended from Omani immigrants in the nineteenth century. While some were still successful landowners, others had become destitute, forced to sell their land, or deeply indebted to moneylenders. Several Arab dynasties continued to dominate the Sultan's circle and they seized opportunities to educate their sons in the 1920s, ensuring their continued influence within the colonial government. They were influenced by intellectual movements inherited from the *ulamaa* [Muslim scholars] of the nineteenth century, as well as by the concept of Pan-Arab nationalism emanating from Egypt in the 1910s. In contrast, the Manga Arabs and Yemeni Arabs, recent immigrants from Oman and Yemen, were much poorer. The Manga Arabs led a riot in Zanzibar Town in 1937 over a new decree regulating clove production.

The South Asian community were of course not all financiers or merchants. They came from various parts of the Western Indian seaboard, from Goa to Gujarat, and adhered to various sects of Islam or Hinduism.⁹⁶ Their number included extremely wealthy merchants, ambitious to modernise and keep pace with developments in India, lobbying government for the creation of universities for their children. This community also included shopkeepers and those for whom education was an unaffordable expense. Their relationships with the Protectorate Government were further complicated by the fact that they were also British Indian subjects.

The 'African' category was particularly multifarious and complex. The British often used the term interchangeably with 'native' which, even putting aside the pejorative connotation, was complicated to define in a territory with so many phases of immigration throughout its history. The majority of the 'African' population was made up of indigenous communities known as Wahadimu on Zanzibar, Watumbatu on Tumbatu and Wapemba on Pemba. Few referred to themselves as Swahili and, increasingly in the interwar years, they used the terms listed above or claimed Shirazi descent.⁹⁷ The British term 'African' also included former slaves, emancipated since 1897, who were originally from the mainland but by the 1920s had become established residents generally claiming Swahili identity.⁹⁸ Recent immigrants from the East African mainland, for example from Manyema in Tanganyika, were also included in this category. Not all of these 'Africans' were poor. In Pemba, several had bought land, became plantation owners and lived much more equitably with the Arab community than on Unguja.⁹⁹

An unusual area of commonality between all of Zanzibar's many groupings was that almost all believed themselves to be part of a

network that linked them to areas or peoples beyond the islands.¹⁰⁰ These links, whether real or imagined, profoundly affected cultural and social perspectives. Thus, Arab families were influenced by family connections to Oman but also by intellectual movements in the Hadraumat, Egypt and Iran. South Asians felt themselves within the orbit of India but also looked to South Asian communities in South Africa, mainland East Africa and Britain. Many indigenous islanders still maintained ideological connections to the Middle East through their claims to Shirazian identity. Recent immigrants supported their families on the East African mainland. The British were not only connected to Britain but to a global imperial community. A great number had served across the Empire prior to postings to Zanzibar; indeed, some had spent the majority of their lives in imperial service. Their identity was a mobile one rooted in British culture but was adapted and reconfigured in individual colonial contexts.¹⁰¹ While the British community is the focus of this book, it is vital to recognise that Zanzibar was a node where webs of global influence informed elements of the lives of individuals from almost every community. Paying close attention to these overlapping networks in colonial Zanzibar makes an important contribution to our understanding of the global in the twentieth century.

The Zanzibar Museum opened in November 1925, though it had a much longer ‘pre-history’ than has previously been appreciated. The opening chapter will examine this period before 1922 and the role of material culture and display, in particular the different types of spaces and contexts in which objects took on their specific meanings. The design of the Museum building forms the subject of the second chapter, and the following three chapters examine its period of greatest activity up to 1942, focusing in succession upon the people who worked there, the collections and the educational activities.¹⁰² The final chapter investigates the period from 1942 to 1964, in particular the shift in focus from the Museum to the construction of the Archives. In the conclusion I reflect upon the meaning of the collection and building in the post-colonial era.

This in-depth analysis represents the first serious investigation of this multifaceted and responsive institution. The Museum was not simply a static display case for Empire. It was a space in which encounters took place: between peoples, objects and ideas. Combining detailed study of its architectural design and construction with analyses of the collection, displays and activities, this book reveals the complexity of colonial knowledge production in the changing political

context of the twentieth-century British Empire. It reveals the broad spectrum of people from different communities who shaped its existence as staff, informants, collectors and teachers. Through vivid narratives involving people, objects and exhibits, it exposes the fractures, contradictions and tensions in creating and maintaining a colonial museum, and casts light on the conflicted character of the 'colonial mission' in eastern Africa.

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- 5 This will be discussed further in Chapter 1. See Amy Staniforth, 'Becoming Human: Nostalgia, Nature and Nation in the Search for Human Origins in Twentieth Century Tanzania' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2007), 295.
- 6 Sophie Mew, 'Rethinking Heritage and Display in National Museums in Ghana and Mali' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2012); Paul Basu, 'A Museum for Sierra Leone? Amateur Enthusiasms and Colonial Museum Policy in British West Africa', in *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, ed. John McAleer and Sarah Longair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 145–67.
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- 12 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Insightful approaches to reading the colonial archive are also discussed in Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, ed., *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
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- 15 Ibid., 63.
- 16 Ibid., 71.
- 17 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 198.
- 18 Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne, and Bruce W. Ferguson (Routledge, 1995), 82.
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⁶⁶ Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians', 629.

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⁷⁷ Abdul Sheriff, 'Conclusion', in *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule*, ed. Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson (London: James Currey, 1991), 255.

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- 96 Gijsbert Oonk has investigated South Asian communities in East Africa. See Gijsbert Oonk, 'South Asians in East Africa (1880–1920) with a Particular Focus on Zanzibar', *African and Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1 January 2006): 57–90.; Oonk, 'Negotiating Hinduism in East Africa, 1860–1960', *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, 3:2 (November 2008): 93–123.
- 97 Abdul Sheriff, 'Race and Class in the Politics of Zanzibar', *Africa Spectrum* 36, no. 3 (January 2001): 307; Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 50–55.
- 98 Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001).
- 99 Sheriff, 'Race and Class', 303.
- 100 Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 6. Anne Bang extends the metaphor often applied to Zanzibar's population as a 'patchwork' or 'mosaic' of peoples: 'each patch came with strings attached – links and networks particular to their own group and with certain sets of characteristics ascribed to them by other "patches"': Anne K. Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 5.
- 101 Such imperial 'careerists' and the way they bring their diverse experience to bear in different territories is explored in David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds, *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Tamson Pietsch, 'A British Sea: Making Sense of Global Space in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 3 (2010): 423–46.
- 102 This is developed from models of examining museums as spaces of interaction, such as Sophie Forgan, 'Building the Museum: Knowledge, Conflict and the Power of Place', *Isis* 96, no. 4 (2005): 572.

Museum Precedents: British Imperial Culture, Collecting and Display in Zanzibar, 1897–1922

Bags I the drum!

General Sir Lloyd Mathews during the Witu campaigns in the 1890s.¹

Imbued with Victorian traditions of collecting, British colonial officers readily engaged with local modes of display in Zanzibar. In formats developed over millennia of trade and cultural exchange on the islands, local homes contained carefully arranged ceramics, furniture and artefacts, reflecting the varied meanings conveyed by the objects: as commodities, ornaments of aesthetic value or status symbols.² This chapter examines how the British residents of Zanzibar presented objects in various configurations, prior to the establishment of the Museum in the 1920s, and the rationale behind these arrangements, whether to promote trade, project imperial identity or educate through didactic models. From the transient spectacle of the Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905 to the doomed museum scheme in the early 1910s, these projects trace important continuities from the earliest days of the Protectorate to the creation of the Zanzibar Museum in the interwar period. Conceptually, the British approach to understanding Zanzibar's culture and history was framed by the enduring image of Zanzibar as 'an Eastern city'. The implications of this perception and the contradictions within it form an underlying theme within this chapter.

Museum projects are often preceded by years of gestation. They suffer delays and false starts until the moment when support from authorities, public will, adequate funds and dedicated personnel coincide. Zanzibar's example was no different, and studying these early years uncovers a much longer 'museum history' than has previously been appreciated. Simultaneously, examining alternative modes of engagement with objects and artefacts during these years offers new perspective on colonial relations, uncovering metropolitan, regional, transimperial and local influences that influenced the Museum in the 1920s. This investigation into the everyday performativity of British colonial Zanzibar – of which display and objects were a vital part – provides further evidence of the chaotic and fractured culture of colonial governance.

Any investigation into the meaning of material culture in early colonial Zanzibar requires careful attention to the political, economic and social context in Zanzibar and East Africa. The period from 1897 to 1922 was one of transition and consolidation in the region.³ The completion of the Uganda Railway in 1905 opened up British East Africa for settlement and investment, transforming the geopolitics of the region. German East Africa had developed since 1885 into the most productive territory of the East African region – an imbalance which, as we shall see, became clear in the 1905 Zanzibar Exhibition. In Zanzibar, the dawn of the new century was a symbolic moment in the minds of those who witnessed it and ushered in an age which would shape the political and economic context of the Protectorate for two decades and more. The transfer of administration of the Protectorate from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office in 1913 was a milestone for the British; a change put in motion by events at the turn of the century. A point of emphasis throughout this chapter will be the diverse nature of European reactions to the colonial experience – investigated in other colonial contexts but yet to be thoroughly studied in the case of Zanzibar.⁴ There was no great unity of purpose; divisions and hierarchies fed resentment, which adversely affected British policy, and the relationships among Zanzibar's many communities were varied and complex. This chapter will explore, through the cultures of display and imperial identity, how the British community responded to this period of transition.

Political, Economic and Administrative Transformations: 1897–1922

The period from 1897 to 1922 formed two distinct phases. The first period, 1897 to 1913, was one of increasing tension, defined by struggles between the Sultan's Government and the British Consulate. This system of dual government with two competing centres of power became increasingly untenable. The transfer of responsibility for Zanzibar to the Colonial Office in 1913 brought the Protectorate Government into a single system under the British Resident and, nominally, the Sultan. The Great War slackened the pace of social and administrative development, although this resumed with renewed vigour after the cessation of hostilities.

The law finally abolishing slavery, passed in 1897, had significant economic and social ramifications, which reverberated throughout the period in question. As Fair and Glassman have demonstrated, transformations took place at all levels of society in the wake of the abolition, with communal identities claimed and reshaped.⁵ The final

passing of the law had been preceded by decades of diplomatic manoeuvring. British consuls in Zanzibar had advocated gradual change, resisting the humanitarian aspirations of Whitehall.⁶ Of the many outcomes of abolition, the British were most concerned with maintaining the profitability of the clove export trade: the export taxes levied on this crop upheld the solvency of the Protectorate.⁷ It is important to recognise that this fragile economic situation existed prior to abolition as a result of the gradual decline in the fortunes of Arab plantation owners during the nineteenth century,⁸ a situation that had been masked by Arab political dominance.⁹ Abolition exacerbated these difficulties and further increased the plantation owners' indebtedness to Indian financiers. By way of a compromise, the British instituted a complex and restrictive process within the emancipation decree to decelerate the impact upon the Arab landowning community.¹⁰ As manumission took effect, plantation owners increasingly relied upon mainland immigrants, squatters, former slaves and indigenous islanders to participate in seasonal clove production.¹¹

The British voiced concerns in the 1900s about the conduct of the young Arab landowners upon whom the success of the plantations depended.¹² These young men inherited established plantations yet lacked the business experience and, so the British believed, the necessary dedication to manage the transition to the post-abolition era. They continued to live lavishly, ratcheting up their debts. In 1911, Edward Clarke, then British Agent and Consul General in Zanzibar and former Head of the Africa Section in the Foreign Office, drew attention to the negative effect of abolition upon the Arab population in a letter to the Foreign Minister. Long-term European residents of the island believed that British 'well-meant efforts ... have only resulted in ruin, drunkenness and debauchery'. He continued:

There is at any rate no doubt that the British passion for being humane at somebody else's expense has succeeded in bringing the first disaster, at any rate on the Arabs as a class. Such as survive at all are hopelessly in debt to the Indian money-lender, and the younger members of that community are much given to drink.¹³

While these economic difficulties preceded abolition in 1897, the conspicuous social problems amongst the politically dominant class of Arabs strengthened British resolve to intervene more forcefully in the Sultan's government, leading ultimately to the administrative reorganisation in 1913.

Another central factor in the decline of the dual government system was the investment of power in incumbent individuals at the highest level of government. Relations between the Sultan, his First Minister and the British Agent and Consul General determined the character

and success of the administration. The deaths of General Sir Lloyd Mathews, First Minister to the Sultan, in 1901, followed soon after in 1902 by Sultan Hamud bin Muhammad, instigated significant political transformations and revealed the fragility inherent in this system.

The Protectorate Government lost a towering personality with the passing of Lloyd Mathews, a naval officer turned administrator who rose to become the most powerful individual in Zanzibar. His career merits further investigation, as his style of rule established models to which subsequent administrators responded. He had been a central figure since his arrival in the 1870s, forging close relationships with key figures from the various communities, developing an understanding of local culture and establishing a forceful reputation across the island.¹⁴ John Sinclair recalled that: ‘He exercised a tremendous influence over the inhabitants of Zanzibar of all classes and was greatly loved, respected and feared by all’.¹⁵ As Brigadier-General in the 1880s and then First Minister to the Sultan from 1891, Mathews dominated the administration and treasury for two decades. He governed through force of personality, with colleagues noting that he possessed neither much administrative skill nor aptitude for finance.¹⁶ During the 1890s, Mathews worked cordially alongside the British Consuls, including Sir Gerald Portal and Sir Rennell Rodd, to establish the dual form of government with British advisers responsible for departments in the Sultan’s government. He personally distributed justice and decreed punishments.¹⁷ Rodd described local people travelling great distances so that Mathews could arbitrate their disputes: he would sit outside his house, as at a Swahili *baraza*, and listen to their claims.¹⁸ Mathews’s sister, Estella Cave, argued that his knowledge of Qur’anic law meant his pronouncements carefully satisfied both Muslim and British interests.¹⁹

Written accounts and photographs suggest that the social scene also revolved around him. Many European officials regarded themselves as his ‘personal staff’.²⁰ Hollingsworth later likened Mathews’s government to that of ‘an Arab patriarch ruling his household’.²¹ In [Figure 1.1](#), an informal but carefully constructed image, shows Mathews in a group photograph on the veranda of one of the bungalows on Prison Island.²² Several key members of Zanzibar’s European elite are present including John Sinclair, Dr Charlesworth and Robert Lyne. The presence of a couple identified as George and Estella Cave (the former, the elder brother of Basil Cave, the latter Mathews’s sister) dates the photograph to 1901 when the couple were on a tour of the region, later chronicled in Estella Cave’s *Three Journeys*.²³ Notable in this photograph is Mathews’s choice of clothing – a Swahili *kofia* cap and an Arab robe over his tie and shirt – alluding to his long residency on the island and an incorporation of local

clothing by Europeans, a practice not hitherto discussed in the literature on Zanzibar.²⁴ Other trappings of 'home', the table and chairs, dogs and the European clothing, are clearly visible. Such informal photographs complement our view of the many formal occasions over which Mathews presided. Photographs of his funeral, when thousands of people from all communities lined the streets to witness the long procession winding through the Stone Town, were widely circulated in the 1900s.

Although his death occurred at the beginning of the period in question, Mathews's legacy endured. Those who had served alongside him, including Robert Lyne, Sinclair and Spurrier, reminisced admiringly about his ability to command respect. These men retained a strong nostalgia for the 1890s. For them, the 'good old F.O. days' were a time when Zanzibar was managed effectively by a handful of individuals and 'was in reality the Metropolis of the East Coast of Africa'.²⁵ Luiz Andrade, a Portuguese former Collector of the Administration in the Sultan's Government, wrote to Spurrier in 1929, astonished to see the large number of European Residents recorded in the Zanzibar Annual Report: 'What a difference between now and the dear old days of the late lamented Sir Lloyd. He with old Cursetji ran the whole Island's Government'.²⁶ Lyne, who later wrote Mathews's biography, believed in the great value of 'the patriarchal approach' and 'the personal touch which prevailed when Zanzibar was under the Foreign Office' as compared with the 'red tape' of the Colonial Office era from 1913.²⁷ Lyne asserted that the change in administrative style 'became inevitable as soon as the transfer to the Colonial Office took place though signs of its approach appeared as soon as Mathews went'.²⁸

Figure 1.1 Group photograph on the Prison Island bungalow veranda. Identified figures: seated: from left, General Sir Lloyd Mathews, Estella Cave, unidentified, John Sinclair. Standing: from centre to right, George Cave, Robert Lyne, unidentified, Dr Charlesworth. ZNA: AV 4/5.

Immediately after Mathews's death, a Committee was set up to commemorate his contribution to Zanzibar. Public donations paid for a memorial and additional wards in the Leper Establishment at Walezo.²⁹ The monument took the form of an obelisk, situated on the corner of Mnazi Mmoja grounds, directly adjacent to the site where the Museum would eventually be built (Figure 1.2).³⁰ A wreath was laid on the memorial annually on 11 October, the day of his death. This practice appears to have ceased in the 1910s, but was revived by later British Residents: in 1924 by Sir Claud Hollis, and in 1935 by Sir Richard Rankine who placed wreaths both on the Mathews Memorial and upon his grave, in the company of the oldest member of the

European community.³¹ The last recorded instance of this ritual is in 1953.³² This explicitly ‘invented tradition’ attests to the legacy of this renowned figure of imperial rule; his domineering role in the Sultan’s Government epitomised the very direct nature of ‘indirect rule’ in the Zanzibar Protectorate.³³

The deaths of Mathews and Sultan Hamud brought two new figures to power – Alexander Stuart Rogers as First Minister and the young Sultan Ali bin Hamud, then aged 18 and completing his education at Harrow. Thus was ushered in a period of instability and tension. Rogers was an experienced but unreliable administrator while Sultan Ali’s style of government increasingly provoked the British Consulate and Foreign Office.

Rogers became First Minister and Regent from 1902 to 1905 while Sultan Ali completed his education. This represented the latest stage in a life inextricably linked to the Empire – an excellent example of ‘imperial careering’ in and around the Indian Ocean.³⁴ Born in Peshawar, India, Rogers’s only extended period in England took place while at school at Wellington, after which he served in the Punjab Police for eight years before arriving in Mombasa in 1890 as part of a police force for the Imperial British East Africa Company.³⁵ In 1891, he became Protector at Witu, serving alongside Mathews in campaigns on the coast. From 1895 he acted as a Sub-Commissioner of the East African Protectorate, commanding a force of Sudanese troops. He had a reputation as an autocratic administrator; Sinclair reported that he ‘reigned supreme’ at Lamu.³⁶ This mobility defined his self-image, which was expressed, as we shall see, through his own collections.

Figure 1.2 Postcard of the General Sir Lloyd Mathews Monument. ZNA: AV 36/109.

Criticism of Rogers’s conduct was voiced to the Foreign Office in 1905 by Basil Cave, Agent and Consul General from 1903 to 1908. Cave delayed reporting these issues, knowing he was condemning ‘a man who is, to some extent, a personal friend’.³⁷ Cave blamed Rogers’s weak character for the growing difficulties with the young Sultan. After ‘getting into trouble for opposing the Sultan’, Rogers regularly conceded ‘even on matters of some importance, for the sake of keeping good graces’.³⁸ Cave listed many concerns, but it was Rogers’s alcoholism and fondness for gambling that worried him most gravely. This behaviour seriously affected his health and memory and had ‘a bad effect on the tone of the community’. Any discussion of administrative business after lunch was ‘to all intents and purposes ... an impossibility’.³⁹ Cave suggested that Rogers’s failing health might provide sufficient justification for the Foreign Office to remove him. Cave concluded by confirming that he would continue to work with

Rogers if the Foreign Office preferred not to remove him: 'it is a post in which, under existing circumstances, a man cannot do very much practical harm'. With this single sentence, Cave captured the status of Zanzibar within the Empire but as we shall see, individuals posted there, such as Rogers, relished the opportunity to present themselves publicly as men of great importance and influence. In the end, Rogers took retirement, evidently under advice from the Foreign Office, while on six months leave in England for his wedding in late 1905, much to the consternation of the young Sultan.⁴⁰

Sultan Ali bin Hamud proved particularly challenging for the British administration of the Protectorate after gaining his majority in 1905. As a consequence of his European education, he was dissatisfied with the Arab court and resisted attempts by the British administrators to control him.⁴¹ His Europeanised lifestyle and fondness for trips to Paris were severely criticised – one of the paradoxes in British attitudes towards the education of non-Europeans.⁴² In a memorandum commenting upon a typically bullish letter from Sultan Ali to the British Consul General in 1906, Edward Clarke, then Head of the Africa Section at the Foreign Office, asked:

But why should poor Zanzibar be handed over as a sort of vile body for a young Arab to try experiments on? What other country over which we have control is governed by a native as he likes? ⁴³

Clarke and Cave consistently lobbied the Foreign Office on the need to formalise British administrative power and limit the Sultan's influence.⁴⁴ The Foreign Office advised Cave that the gradual increase in British intervention should not be made explicit: 'It is, on the contrary, desirable that the stricter that subordination becomes in practice, the more carefully His Highness' independence should be ostensibly and in theory maintained'.⁴⁵ As with several of the Indian princely states, which were often held up as examples of 'indirect rule', British intervention in administrative affairs was in reality direct and assertive.⁴⁶ Cultural events and rituals were one tactic to create an illusion of the Sultan's power, while retaining overall control in British hands.

Such personal struggles occupied a disproportionate amount of Government time, as exposed by a searing critique in 1906. C. E. Akers was appointed as Secretary for Finance and Trade in Zanzibar specifically to report on the financial, commercial and economic situation in the Protectorate. He was shocked by what he found. Amongst his complaints, he berated the Government for the lavish expenditure on 'so-called improvements' in the town, while in the country districts 'little or nothing has been done [to assist] either landed proprietor or peasantry'.⁴⁷ He bemoaned what he saw as a

poor education system and the short office hours of Government. Akers anticipated the revenue from exports would decline with the growth of the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam and in order to compete he recommended an extensive road-building programme to facilitate the production of cloves. With this report, Akers highlighted a hitherto unacknowledged truth, that other than improvements in sanitary conditions, British intervention in the island had brought little, if any, significant progress for the people of the Protectorate.

Akers did not stay long. He departed the island in 1908; apparently he 'had never been happy in Zanzibar'.⁴⁸ Though Cave felt slighted by the criticisms, he hastily put several recommendations in motion. Harbour improvement and road-building programmes were initiated, and by 1913 there were 75 miles of roads around Unguja.⁴⁹ Office hours were extended, and Rivers-Smith, an experienced education officer from Egypt, was employed as Director of Education. The judicial system was reorganised in 1908, ultimately giving control of all local courts to British judges.⁵⁰ On succeeding Cave as Consul General, Clarke was keen to continue reforms, but his sudden death followed shortly by the outbreak of the war, postponed further developments.⁵¹

Under Rogers's successors as First Minister, Captain Barton and Captain Raikes, relations between the Sultan's Government and the British Consulate remained tense. The Sultan spent an increasing amount of time in Europe and eventually abdicated, in 1911, in favour of his brother-in-law Khalifa bin Harub. Clarke's unexpected death in 1913, shortly after the accession, provided the opportunity to realise the long sought-after rationalisation of Zanzibar's government. Lyne believed this rearrangement was detrimental to Zanzibar. The alignment with the African territories was, for him, culturally and historically inappropriate: 'Though geographically Zanzibar belongs to E. Africa, spiritually and economically it belongs to India and Arabia ...' In his opinion, incorporation into the India Office would have been more appropriate, with the administration structured 'after that of the States of the Ruling Princes'.⁵²

Absorption into the Colonial Office only served to emphasise the increasing importance of the East African mainland territories relative to Zanzibar, as did the creation of the High Commissionership of Zanzibar, a responsibility delegated to the Commissioner of British East Africa (Kenya Colony and Protectorate from 1920). Thus was removed the direct line of communication between Zanzibar and London. This not only expanded administrative bureaucracy but it also, as Lyne suggests, positioned Zanzibar as subsidiary in the East African political sphere. The geographical reorganisation by administrators in the metropole, which defined Zanzibar as part of the

continental region, did not accord with the mindset of its officers on the ground, for whom Zanzibar was 'the East' rather than a part of Africa. This perspective will be explored in the next section, as it informed the imperial identity the British constructed for the Protectorate through its cultural activities.

The Culture of Colonial Governance

The use and meaning of material culture by the British community in Zanzibar must be understood within colonial society and the culture of governance they established in the 1900s and 1910s. It is useful first to sketch out some aspects of this colonial community and their response to their locality. In this, their perspective was shaped, even before their arrival on the island, by the image of Zanzibar prevalent in the West. The island was synonymous with the exotic in the Western imagination; the word itself epitomised mysterious otherness. As American novelist Ralph D. Paine wrote in 1925: 'Zanzibar peculiarly appealed to the imagination. The very name sounded gorgeously exotic'.⁵³ Writers regularly described it as an 'Arabian Nights' city; a world of sultans, bazaars and labyrinthine streets.⁵⁴ Elements specific to Zanzibar were fused with more generic images of the Orient drawn from books, exhibitions and performances in the West.⁵⁵ Zanzibar represented what might be termed the 'familiar unknown'; it was reassuringly acceptable as the epitome of the remote exotic.⁵⁶

Zanzibar was also renowned as the departure point for explorers such as David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley.⁵⁷ In these accounts, the apparently oriental exoticism of Zanzibar contrasted with the wild unknown of the African continent.⁵⁸ In the later nineteenth century, the Victorian public became more directly familiar with Zanzibar thanks to Sultan Barghash's 1875 visit to London. He was received by the Royal Family, went to Ascot, the opera and theatre, and travelled to towns across England where, according to Lyne, he became 'not merely fashionable but popular'.⁵⁹ At this time the figure of the Sultan of Zanzibar became a familiar music-hall character.⁶⁰

Visitors to the island in the mid-nineteenth century, burdened with preconceptions, were disappointed that Zanzibar did not wholly live up to their expectations.⁶¹ David Livingstone and Richard Burton found conditions unhygienic and dirty; Livingstone famously described it as 'Stinkibar'.⁶² Burton was an experienced traveller in the Islamic world, and his critique of the townscape compared Zanzibar unfavourably with other Islamic cities:

A Puritanical plainness characterized the scene – cathedrals without the graceful minarets of Jeddah, mosques without the cloisters of Cairo, turrets without the domes and monuments of Syria; and the straight sky-line was unrelieved except by a few straggling palms.⁶³

This viewpoint was inherited and paraphrased by British administrator-authors, such as Frederick Pearce, and later by Henry Lanchester in his town plan for the city in 1923.⁶⁴ The so-called ‘puritanical plainness’ was in fact a necessity for the Ibathi sect of Islam whose mosques were externally plain and deliberately unostentatious, but Zanzibar’s skyline did not chime with the British conception of an Islamic city, an image formed in the Near East. This preoccupation with creating an Eastern city and the desire to adorn the skyline with ‘appropriate’ architectural forms is further examined in [Chapter 2](#).

Similarly, the Swahili people and their coastal culture were held up for criticism. Jeremy Prestholdt draws our attention to the ways in which mid-nineteenth-century travellers described the Swahili as a hybrid race. Such hybridity indicated degeneracy; the Swahili appeared to exhibit the most negative traits associated with black and Arab populations. Prestholdt argues that the peoples of mainland Africa were seen as having greater future potential than these ‘mongrel’ coastal peoples.⁶⁵

In the early twentieth century, and with an improvement in sanitation, writers began to offer a more positive tone. Many found the city lived up to and even exceeded their expectations. Richard Harding Davis, the American journalist and author, was familiar with Zanzibar ‘through comic operas and rag-time’.⁶⁶ His evocative account of his visit in 1907 distilled the archetypes of Zanzibar: the tropical sun and the dark stone town; the hectic bustle of the streets; sumptuous textures, vivid colours, novel sounds; fleeting encounters with local men, women and children; the romance of historic and religious sites.⁶⁷ Even he was surprised by the theatricality of the city:

There is not a street, or any house in any street, that does not suggest in its architecture and decoration the untrammelled fancy of the scenic artist. You feel sure that the latticed balconies are canvas, that the white adobe walls are supported from behind by braces, ... that the chorus of boatmen who hail you on landing will reappear immediately costumed as the Sultan’s body-guard.⁶⁸

His analogy positions the city as a stage set and its inhabitants as performers who are there to re-enact a Western fantasy. Encountering the town for the first time, Harding Davis found the city almost too characteristic of oriental imagery to be believed. When actually experiencing the ‘familiar unknown’, Zanzibar’s very typicality in fact seemed unreal.⁶⁹

These accounts expose how the oriental splendours of the past fed

the romantic imagination of visitors and colonial officials. While the British administration introduced elements of modernity, as befitted the civilising impulse of empire, they too were seduced by the romance of Zanzibar's past. J. F. Elton wrote in 1879 that he hoped that 'from such revilers of the picturesque I trust a kindly Providence may long deliver the quaint, queer, rambling old Arab town of Zanzibar'.⁷⁰ Elton's comment was quoted in the official *Guide to Zanzibar* from 1932 onwards, fixing the notion of the picturesque old Arab town in the mind of the official and the visitor. The British continued to view Zanzibar through this oriental and exotic lens, whether or not the reality countered the illusion.

The British response to living in this colonial tropical island setting is revealed in both their official and informal behaviour, as captured in photographs, the *Gazette* and personal memoirs. During the early years, British rule in the colonial territories of Africa was formalised through the creation of traditions, often with roots in the army or public schools, to present the British administration as responsible and authoritative.⁷¹ In Zanzibar, rituals and exclusive events were parts of the machinery of hegemony used by all three elite communities – the Europeans, the Arabs and the Indians – to maintain their dominance over the mixed 'African' population.⁷² While the Europeans certainly differentiated themselves from the Arab and Indian elites, and considered themselves superior, there was lively interaction in formal and informal settings, where the groups observed and performed to one another. The opulent rituals of the Arab rulers in turn encouraged British activities to become lavish and conspicuous. As we shall see, such invented traditions were to become increasingly problematic, undermining their original purpose.

From 1890 to 1913, a social and professional hierarchy existed between the European staffs of the two government bodies: the Consular staff – appointed by the Foreign Office – and the members of the Sultan's Government.⁷³ Men such as Sinclair were typical of the former group, well educated with some administrative training in London. Members of the latter group were often Europeans already resident in Zanzibar. For appointment to the Sultan's Government, local experience, whether in military service or commercial activity, counted above administrative capabilities.⁷⁴ Any long-term resident who avoided major indiscretions or errors of judgement could expect to be promoted through the ranks.⁷⁵ Hollingsworth, writing in the 1950s, believed these men lacked the 'integrity and efficiency' of the Foreign Office men.⁷⁶ The dichotomy was not necessarily as clear-cut. Several members of the Sultan's service, such as Robert Lyne and Alfred Spurrier, were dedicated and conscientious administrators, as Hollingsworth acknowledged. Photographs and diaries indicate that

these groups shared the same social spheres and formed lifelong friendships, as can be seen through their network of correspondence in the late 1920s.

The transfer to the Colonial Office changed the style of Government after 1913. Social practices, attitudes and etiquette from the early phase endured, however, and were inherited from the 'old hands' by newly arrived officers. Regular departures and arrivals and short periods of service exacerbated the need to ingratiate oneself rapidly into a professional and social setting. Public spaces such as the club, with its rules and regulations, offered a structure inside which patterns of behaviour could be learned. The English Club in Zanzibar was probably the oldest in East Africa and catered for 'a "very closed" English community'.⁷⁷ Ethel Younghusband, accompanying her husband in the King's African Rifles in 1907–8, commented that 'like all small colonial places, the people are extremely punctilious about etiquette, ridiculously so'.⁷⁸ These institutions created a reassuring, if conservative and arguably stultifying, British colonial culture.⁷⁹ Two memoirs from the 1930s, those of Fergus Wilson, Agricultural Officer, and Helen Wilson [no relation], Secretary to the Chief Secretary, confirm the survival of these formalities.⁸⁰

The *Gazette* gave detailed descriptions of European social activity in Zanzibar in its *Supplement* section, almost akin to a society circular. Articles described lavish events, such as the Venetian masque ball at the British Agency, somewhat incongruously to raise funds for a leper hospital, where 'gondoliers' rowed attendees away after the party, watched, according to the writer, 'by thousands of natives'.⁸¹ Members of the Arab and Indian elites also attended these functions. The short office hours, so criticised by Akers, allowed considerable leisure time to plan parties, which often included fancy dress. While such occasions were necessarily exclusive and private, their public proclamation to onlookers and in print was vital. The *Gazette*'s coverage became an important component in the construction and projection of the British community's identity. After the transfer to the Colonial Office administration, the number of officers increased greatly and many more brought their wives with them. Even Sinclair and Spurrier, who witnessed and approved of the administrative improvements after 1913, harked back nostalgically to the early years and the smaller community.

Officers in the Sultan's government were particularly disposed to displays of conspicuous self-aggrandisement, which increased in regularity and opulence during the 1900s. By the early 1910s, as relations deteriorated between the Sultan, his First Minister and the British Agent and Consul General, such displays became even more exaggerated. A harsh critique of the European community in 1911 by

Clarke vividly described these scenes, using, like Harding Davis, the metaphor of performance. As well as Zanzibar society being 'a gambling, whisky-drinking, and nasty-story-telling body', he perceived a 'large element of pantomime'.⁸² He believed the foreign consuls suffered from 'the *morbus consularis* which, I understand, afflicts persons of that class in Eastern countries, [who] are intimately convinced that they are very great people indeed'. They attached 'absurd importance to ... the hoisting of little flags and big flags, the exact positions they occupy in carriages and rickshaws, their being saluted or not saluted by askaris [guards], and, above all, their passion for putting on their uniforms and running about in the blazing heat of the day paying calls on one another and drinking champagne'.⁸³ Clarke blamed the Sultan, whose questionable behaviour and 'bobtail of sultanas, concubines, eunuchs, and children of various coffee-shades' in the 'shabby relics of the tawdry splendours of a tenth-rate Arab court' resembled 'a very inferior circus entering a small country town'.⁸⁴

For Clarke, British officers in the Sultan's Government were as guilty as foreign consuls. When Captain Barton, appointed First Minister to the Sultan in 1908, and his fellow officers wore their honours bestowed by the Sultan, which 'in size and glitter and colour would not discredit a Drury Lane extravaganza', any spectator would have 'the impression that the whole Zanzibar administration is a glorious knockabout farce'. Sinclair's memoirs build on this description, recalling the Sultan's European officers' great love of their 'white uniforms ... garnished with scarlet collars and cuffs' and emblazoned with gold and the 'stars and medals' given by foreign consuls.⁸⁵ The officers of the British Agency and Consulate, under the regulations of the Foreign Office, were not permitted to wear foreign honours. Such rituals and the wearing of honours were not confined by the Sultan's Government to holidays or special occasions. Clarke regretfully concluded: 'The comic opera element ... is thus brought into everyday life'.⁸⁶

This damning judgement by Clarke was designed to bring attention to the laxity of Sultan Ali and the failings of the dual government system. Although men employed by the Sultan's Government were not technically British officers, Hollingsworth later wrote that their public conduct undermined 'British prestige in the eyes of the local people'.⁸⁷ Clarke and Captain Barton at this time were bitterly debating how to reorganise the administration, resenting the others' independence.⁸⁸ It should be noted that Clarke was not entirely guilt-free. Sinclair noted that Clarke himself called for public recognition of his rank and superiority.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, both the British Agents and Consuls-General during this time, Cave and Clarke, were keen to improve the

standard of officer appointed to the Zanzibar Government, and remove the image of a hard-drinking society.⁹⁰ The reconfiguration of Government in 1913 brought a measure of success, as all British officers became directly responsible to the British Resident. This curtailed certain practices, such as the excessive wearing of honours, and gave the administration power to regulate the behaviour of its staff. Nonetheless, the calendar of official functions and rituals remained a feature of the Zanzibar Government throughout the colonial period.⁹¹

It is interesting to note how Clarke used the analogy of the music hall to ridicule his fellow officials. Europeans, as we have seen, arrived with an image of Zanzibar, constructed through popular culture, which itself was informed by scant impressions of the East and the Orient in the metropolitan world. The behaviour of these officers translated the exaggerated cacophony of the London stage into a reality, which for Clarke, a serious and conscientious servant of the Empire, gravely undermined the imperial mission.

The Europeans were a divided and heterogeneous group. Not all were whisky-drinking and gambling sorts. Dr Spurrier and Dr Charlesworth took their medical responsibilities seriously; Clarke was one of many keen amateur scholars. Lyne actively researched the history of the island and published the results of his work.⁹² There was no agreed mode of behaviour, and transgressions by one group would quickly invoke the criticism of another. This community, which had functioned well in the 1890s, became fractured, a situation intensified by the political and economic pressure of the post-abolition period.

Early British colonial Displays of Objects

The role of material culture, its display and collection formed an integral part of this social setting, where image, identity and self-projection held particular significance. Prior to the opening of the Zanzibar Museum in 1925, objects of ethnographic or scientific interest formed the basis of displays in domestic and official settings. Collections created carefully constructed backdrops for social performances.

Not only did British officers in Zanzibar in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bring with them British conventions of interior display, they encountered the local practice of using artefacts as status symbols. The Beit al-Ajaib or 'House of Wonders', the seafront palace built by Sultan Barghash in the 1880s, was the island's most extravagant example of a conspicuous display of objects and

curiosities. The interior decoration was a wonder in itself, including intricately carved doors, impressive even by Zanzibari standards, a vast array of ceramics and large chandeliers powered by the first electric generator in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹³

The House of Wonders display followed a long tradition on the Swahili coast of meticulously arranged imported artefacts.⁹⁴ Meanings associated with objects shifted as they moved within Indian Ocean circuits of cultural appropriation. Imported ceramics, especially Persian and Chinese porcelain, had been prominent decorative features of mosques and tombs on the East African coast since before the fifteenth century.⁹⁵ By the nineteenth century the domestic display of objects of varied provenance including ceramics, chairs and weaponry, was a common practice in Zanzibar, sometimes in bespoke plaster niches. Such articles drew attention to the family's participation in the Indian Ocean cultural and commercial systems.⁹⁶ The mass production of chinaware permitted an extension of this practice from the world of the patricians to the wider population, even including formerly enslaved people.⁹⁷ Other popular display pieces included Bombay Presidency furniture, made from 'blackwood' or Indian rosewood and decorated with richly carved floral and animal designs. This style became fashionable after Sultan Barghash returned from his exile in India in 1861.

Later in the nineteenth century, a wider range of objects became desirable, such as Victorian wall clocks and ornate mirrors. Prestholdt describes the 'new urban culturedness of Zanzibar': the acquisition of contemporary European curiosities was a signifier of modern culture on the part of the Arab, Indian and local communities.⁹⁸ Changing Zanzibari tastes determined production of such commodities elsewhere in the Empire. The notion of foreign curiosities in this geographical context was therefore not limited to the West looking at the 'other'. The display and celebration of objects in the House of Wonders, though not a museum in the Western sense, was an integral part of its purpose. The audience for this exhibition of sophistication – the elites of the island – was well aware of these meanings.

Photographs of Sir John Kirk's collection (c. 1880s), when acting as British Consul, show that he possessed porcelain and Chinoiserie, the latter already popular in Britain from the seventeenth century, as well as ethnographic objects and natural history specimens. These were symmetrically positioned in scrupulously designed wall displays. The combination expressed Kirk's personal experience and transimperial career in the Indian Ocean network.⁹⁹ Such arrangements established a model for his successors in the administration, who adopted many of these tropes of display for their own collections. Unlike in India where Indian objects became increasingly less fashionable in the

nineteenth century, British administrators in Zanzibar openly displayed their collections of Zanzibari, mainland African and Indian material culture to project their experience and identity within domestic and official spaces.¹⁰⁰

General Sir Lloyd Mathews was an avid collector. He cited the words quoted at the opening of the chapter during the subjugation of a mainland village in the 1890 Witu campaigns. This aggressive call to seize objects in battle accords with the notorious image of imperial bombast and pillaging as colonial officers enriched their collections through violence and conquest. Mathews also acquired local objects through other means. The large collection in his house in Zanzibar Town included ivory, china, glass and richly decorated antique furniture, as described by Estella Cave in 1901. The celadon bowls and dishes, which she described as being of the Song dynasty, ‘had been given to the General year by year by his blood-brethren ... I do not know how many of these brethren he had, but from the number of these beautiful specimens I should think they were a large family’.¹⁰¹ Such objects did not just have aesthetic significance but their provenance attested to and provided material evidence of Mathews’s claims to the loyalty of many individuals and families across the island.

The collection of Rogers, Mathews’s successor, is significant for several reasons. It included several treasures of Zanzibar’s history that would later become part of the Museum collection and that were first displayed publicly while in his possession. Rogers’s display can be seen as an illusion of power, designed to counter his failings as an administrator. His involvement in major projects, the Regent’s residence and the Zanzibar Exhibition, diverted attention from his professional shortcomings. Arguably, the greatest legacy of Rogers’s tenure was the commission he offered to the young John Sinclair to design his palatial residence – the first major British construction of the Protectorate. Sinclair’s first essay in Zanzibar, in the eclectic style which came to define his work, proclaimed British imperial dominance in a building which formed the backdrop to the theatre of power, constructing a space for the display and performance of empire. The architecture of this building will be examined in [Chapter 2](#), but it is worth noting here the timing and significance of the commission in the context of Rogers’s career.

Rogers’s various posts provided several opportunities for collecting. His photograph album contains a number of images of the different interiors he inhabited, as well as photographs of particular pieces, which resemble still life compositions. He showed an almost fetishistic reverence for his collection. Photographs of his residence in Lamu indicate that he had already begun to compile and meticulously

arrange objects of varied origins within his domestic space. He translated this format for the display of his collection in the magnificent new palace in Zanzibar (Figure 1.3).

Like Kirk and many of his contemporaries, Rogers included animal trophies from hunting safaris on the mainland in his display.¹⁰² Beneath the gazelle horns were carefully arranged spears from the mainland, forming fan-shapes in a similar arrangement to the display of swords in halls and country houses in Britain. In this setting, the individual object became less important than the aesthetic of the whole arrangement. Arab swords, daggers and rifles were hung on the far wall. At the near side was a large portrait of Sultan Barghash, painted around 1880, believed to be by Beilouh, an Arab artist painting in the European style.¹⁰³ This painting later appeared in the Wembley exhibition of 1924 and is today in the House of Wonders. The ornately carved Bombay Presidency furniture was prominent and the carpet is likely to have been imported from the Persian Gulf. There were also objects from Zanzibar, including two local styles of carved door and the *viti vya enzi* (pl. of *kiti cha enzi*), chairs of power made of ebony frames with ivory inlay and string panels, used by local dignitaries throughout the Swahili coast.¹⁰⁴

Figure 1.3 Interior of the Regent's residence, c. 1902–1905. RCSL: Rogers Collection on East Africa, GBR/0115/Y30468/C27.

Figure 1.4 The sacred horns and drums of the Mwinyi Mkuu. ZNA: AV 56/4.

The most significant of the objects from Zanzibar in this photograph, though the least immediately obvious, were the 'regalia' of the Mwinyi Mkuu, the pre-Omani rulers of the Wahadimu community on Unguja (Figure 1.4).¹⁰⁵ Kept in secret places only known to the incumbent Mwinyi Mkuu, the sacred drums and horns were only seen in public on ceremonial occasions, such as to rally the people in times of war. These objects were acquired, probably by General Mathews, after the Mwinyi Mkuu dynasty died out in the 1870s. Close examination of Figure 1.3 reveals that the drums were used as tables along the right side of the image, upon which were laid flowers and photographs, while the horn was placed in a niche above the door at the far end. Unlike the spears and skulls which were arranged symmetrically and presented as decorative devices, these drums were relegated to a basic function, perhaps an amusing feature for any who might notice them, and showing the utmost disdain for their spiritual meaning. Rogers denigrated the few material remnants of the longstanding rulers of Zanzibar to a 'platform' upon which the British could display themselves. This position is analogous to the treatment of the indigenous population, whose role was to support

and enable the British performance of empire. The overall arrangement clearly evoked dominion over people and animals, controlled and organised by the civilising British hand.¹⁰⁶

The Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905

The Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905 draws together many of these themes: political and economic instability, imperial performance and the display of material culture.¹⁰⁷ It represents an important precursor to the first proposal for a museum in Zanzibar. The two-day spectacle was an early example of the import of an exhibition model, common across the Empire by the 1900s, to East Africa, that has not yet been discussed in the secondary literature on Zanzibar's history.¹⁰⁸ Reports from the *Gazette* and the examination of hitherto unidentified photographs from Rogers's collection have made this analysis possible. The spectacle was designed to convey Zanzibar's prowess and stimulate trade, but it in fact revealed the Protectorate's diminishing status on the East African stage. It was conducted with characteristic pomp and splendour while also representing the first occasion in Zanzibar of an event explicitly designed to promote trade and commerce.

Economic and social concerns in mid-1900s Zanzibar required concerted action. The economic risk associated with sole dependency on the clove crop drove the need to diversify agricultural produce. Another ongoing anxiety in the 1900s was the demise of crafts amongst the indigenous population: 'almost every art and trade formerly exercised by the native had passed from them into the hands of strangers, principally natives of India'.¹⁰⁹ Particular skills were believed to be dying out. Cheap machine-made versions, for example of *kofia* caps, were being imported from German manufacturers in German East Africa.¹¹⁰ British administrators believed the root of the problem was that slaves had formerly undertaken artisanal activities. Since abolition there was a reluctance to take up a craft perceived as 'slaves' work'.¹¹¹

British members of the Government proposed to tackle these problems by organising an exhibition. As Rogers later stated in his opening speech: 'Such Exhibitions tend to the advancement of a country and the inhabitants whether white or black'.¹¹² Earlier exhibitions had taken place in sub-Saharan Africa, such as the Industrial Exhibition in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1865 and the South African International and Intercolonial Exhibition in Cape Town in 1877.¹¹³ In East Africa, the first intercolonial show was held in 1903 in Mombasa, then part of British East Africa. In 1904, the authorities of German East Africa held an agricultural show in Dar es Salaam,

which attracted several hundred visitors from across German and British East Africa.¹¹⁴ An exhibition had reportedly been discussed for many years by the Zanzibar Government, and in 1905 there was ‘an obligation to take our turn’.¹¹⁵ With impetus generated by the nascent colonies on the mainland, the Zanzibar Government wanted to host a large-scale event to outdo the preceding occasions in grandeur and scale.

In March 1905, the Exhibition was announced in the *Gazette* with both an advertisement and an article explaining its purpose of expanding and diversifying trade within the region. The Committee was keen to point out that this exhibition should make Zanzibaris proud of the territory’s representation: ‘The people of Zanzibar have therefore a threefold responsibility in the forthcoming Show. We have first of all to make it worthy of our guests; secondly we try and excel in competition; and lastly we must make it worthy of Zanzibar’.¹¹⁶

This announcement attempted to mobilise local pride and sense of territorial identity within an intercolonial event which itself showcased the breadth of the resources of the Empire – thus attempting to reinforce both local and imperial identities. The announcement reiterated the need for unity by drawing on the qualities of all communities. The Government believed ‘rich resources of the Island ... lie buried in the go-downs of the bazaar’. The Exhibition could only show ‘what Zanzibar stands for in the local and European markets ... by all members of the different communities – European, Arab, Indian, African – loyally doing their share in exhibiting, and in exhibiting the best they possess or can produce’.¹¹⁷ Although this declaration called for a united endeavour under the flag of Zanzibar, its delivery served to underline the British conception of the population as one divided upon ethnic lines. This was consistent with their policies more generally, which rigidified pre-existing class and ethnic markers in Zanzibar.¹¹⁸

The planning of the Exhibition took several months. The cast of characters involved in its creation are familiar: Lyne was the organising secretary, Sinclair designed the temporary buildings and Rogers presided over the event. Donations in kind were made by the railways on the mainland, offering free passage to exhibitors to allow their participation, a common practice in exhibitions across the world.¹¹⁹ The organisers invited donations of special prizes from all regions, the details of which were published weekly in the *Gazette*. These special awards given by members of the British, Arab and Indian communities of Zanzibar, and Germans from the mainland, reveal further evidence of the intentions of the organisers. Like many charitable donations, these prizes reflect an aspect of self-aggrandisement through public philanthropy, but also indicate the

areas of craft, industry and agriculture that were believed to require encouragement.

For example, Rogers chose to encourage local handicrafts, setting an example by contributing prizes for the best examples of bead work, native embroidery, *makubathi* (uppers of sandals) and *ndara* (soles).¹²⁰ Sinclair donated a prize for the best carved door and the best carved stonework. Dr Spurrier offered to reward the best beeswax candle, as he explicitly wished to encourage what he believed might become a lucrative industry.¹²¹ The range of categories of prizes included export goods and game, as well as 'African curios'. By May, the exhibition criteria were expanded beyond the competition prizes to include objects simply deemed worthy of display, suggesting a wider educational role for the Exhibition.¹²² It is notable that relatively few categories sponsored by Zanzibar's elites were devoted to new technologies with far more concern reserved for the promotion of traditional craftsmanship.

The Exhibition regulations were only published in English, Arabic and Gujarati so the British District Officers were set the task of rousing interest and encouraging participation from village and rural communities.¹²³ Initially, the people were reportedly resistant to the idea: 'at first the natives looked upon the whole affair as a huge *ujanja* [trick] of the *serikali* [government] to seek out the cunning craftsmen and impose taxes upon them'.¹²⁴ Lyne's award to the sheik whose village took the most prizes suggests that he believed the key to exciting interest was to work within local hierarchies.¹²⁵

The District Officer for Pemba wrote afterwards of the difficulties of communicating the concept of the exhibition:

It was very difficult to get the ordinary person here to realize what he was asked to be done [sic]. *Wonyeshano* would have been the best word to carry to their minds what was wanted, but *Mashindano* seemed to be more used, which means more to strive than to exhibit or show. After much talking it began to be realized something extraordinary was wanted. The people began to look for all sorts of wonderful things such as goats with three legs or chickens with 2 heads, cocoanuts with more than the usual sprout. Doubtless it was thought to be a show of curios rather than an exhibition of produce and productions.¹²⁶

The term 'mashindano' in contemporary kiSwahili translates as a competition or contest, while 'wonyeshano' more literally describes an exhibition or demonstration. The interpretation would depend on the competence of the District Officer in conveying the meaning of the event. The challenge to communicate this concept highlights the practical issues of introducing the exhibition model to a colonial territory.

Medals, produced as mementoes of the event, are the only material remnant of the exhibition so far located, other than photographs

(Figure 1.5). These were designed by Sherif Memsaab, a well-respected local artist whose watercolours and oils featured in the Exhibition and later in the Zanzibar Museum display.¹²⁷ These medals proved popular as prizes in place of cash.¹²⁸ The medal design used the clove as the symbol of Zanzibar's prosperity – an avenue of clove trees above a dated banner, with a small clove flower at the base. On the obverse, the Arabic inscription of the Sultan's name was surrounded by cloves and a palm leaf in the form of a laurel wreath. Subsequently the clove motif was reused on the territory's first banknote, tying Zanzibar's visual identity closely to its produce.

Figure 1.5 Medal for the Zanzibar Exhibition. Photograph courtesy of William Barrett.

The event itself took place on Mnazi Mmoja, the open area of grassland reclaimed in the 1890s to provide space for sports and recreation, which the British authorities encouraged (Figure 1.6). This site had a long history of contestation. Over three decades, the British authorities gradually wrested control from the Ismaili Khoja community who originally owned the land.¹²⁹ As well as hosting sporting pursuits, indigenous communities were permitted to use the land to perform the *ngoma*, the local traditional public dances, on festive occasions. These dances regularly drew the biggest crowds to the site.¹³⁰ Mnazi Mmoja was undoubtedly the most convenient and obvious location for an exhibition but it was also the latest in a series of incursions by the Government on the land. The attendance of the Aga Khan, the Ismaili spiritual leader, at the Exhibition was symbolically significant. Positioning him alongside the Government authorities presented a united front to Zanzibar's Ismaili Khoja community. The Aga Khan's influence in India and in the wider region drew respect from the British authorities and he was an important ally in their relationship with this community.¹³¹

Figure 1.6 Zanzibar Exhibition, 1905. RCSL: Rogers Collection, GBR/0115/Y30468/D40.

On 15 August 1905, Rogers opened what he hoped would be 'the most successful Exhibition ever held in Eastern Equatorial Africa'.¹³² The rhetorical style of this celebratory speech was typical of metropolitan exhibitions, which regularly claimed to be the greatest and the best so far seen.¹³³ The countries represented were Zanzibar and Pemba, British East Africa, German East Africa, the Seychelles, Madagascar and Portuguese East Africa. The exhibiting and judging took place on 15 August and on the following day the area became open to 'all classes of the public at 9am' with 'natives' charged 4 annas entrance and all other entrants 1 rupee. A parade of cattle, buffalo, mules and horses took place on the first day and of donkeys on the second. The Exhibition retained elements of the country show,

familiar to the European attendees.

Temporary buildings, designed by Sinclair, were decorated with bunting and banners. These were little more than open sheds spread over an area of 34,600 feet, with the timber sold on after the event (Figure 1.6).¹³⁴ The objects were packed tightly and jurors commented that they struggled to see all the exhibits. In spite of the initial resistance and the District Officers' difficulties in explaining themselves, the desire to be represented caught people's imagination with the result that, 'The sheds literally overflowed with Zanzibar exhibits'.¹³⁵ Once their prejudices had been overcome, 'exhibits not only from natives, but from Arabs and Indians, as well, came in hundreds; the one ambition being apparently to be represented, if not by a hoarded treasure, then by a branch of muhogo [cassava]'.¹³⁶

The *Gazette* gave detailed accounts of the displays and jurors' opinions. Social advancement – better housing and food – was a discernible theme in several categories. As well as the vast quantity and variety of agricultural produce, the 'model of improved native house' category referred directly to 'native development'. One juror concluded from this display that it was probably impossible to design a two-storey hut that was safe and durable.¹³⁷ Of the winners in the 'native arts and crafts industries' categories, many were from the South Asian communities, confirming their continued dominance in this area of the market. For example, not only did the Sinhalese firm based in Zanzibar, Messrs H. H. da Silva Bros, win the 'carved elephant' category, but their ivory and ebony pieces would go on to win second prize in the Fine Art class of the Marseilles Exhibition of 1906.¹³⁸ The Zanzibar Exhibition therefore did succeed in propelling one firm to the European stage.

The British judging panel particularly admired Rogers's private collection from his residence, redisplayed temporarily in the Exhibition (Figure 1.7). This included the regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu – the first occasion when the sacred drums and horn were displayed publicly. The jumbled nature of this collection, piled against a background of hanging Persian carpets, contrasts with the careful arrangement seen earlier in the interior of Rogers's residence. In the Exhibition, where the majority of space was devoted to competition entrants, this historical display used notable artefacts to provide a public showcase for Rogers as First Minister. This first public exhibition of the Mwinyi Mkuu's regalia underlined their transition from ritual object to artefact.¹³⁹ There is no record of the response of islanders to this particular display – whether proud, reverential, aggrieved or curious. It may be significant that a guard is visible in the photograph of Rogers's collection, whereas guards appear in no other photographs of the Exhibition tents other than as part of formal

processions. One can speculate on whether Rogers anticipated a reaction from the Wahadimu to seeing the regalia displayed in this way.

Figure 1.7 Rogers's trophy display, Zanzibar Exhibition, 1905. RCSL: Rogers Collection, GBR/0115/Y30468/D20.

Scant attention is given in the *Gazette* to reactions of the wider population to the Exhibition as a whole. The Government was pleased by the participation of members of all Zanzibar's communities and by the large visitor numbers: 6,363 visited on the second day when the exhibition was open to the public. Local people circulated freely, as shown in the photographs, selecting routes according to their own interest.¹⁴⁰ Their responses to these displays would have been diverse, and like exhibition visitors across the world, they would not have absorbed uncritically those messages conveyed by the Government's public display.¹⁴¹ As we have seen in the choice of objects on display in homes, the local population had particular and discerning tastes and were well practised in using objects to represent their cosmopolitanism and individuality.¹⁴²

The *Gazette* writer noted that one of the most popular exhibits was from the Seychelles: 'a large model in soap of the clock tower erected to Queen Victoria's memory in the capital of that colony, and which was constantly surrounded by an admiring group'(Figure 1.8).¹⁴³ The novelty of this particular item appears to have attracted a great deal of attention and was ultimately purchased by the Sultan of Zanzibar. Although there were hundreds of worthy categories rewarding agricultural production, it was unsurprisingly the curious and novel, expressing virtuosity of craftsmanship, which provoked the greatest response. The soap model was a classic 'exhibition' object: an industrial product in the form of a monument in miniature such as was visible in exhibitions worldwide.¹⁴⁴ It also echoes the perception of the Exhibition as a 'mashindano', displaying objects of wonder and curiosity.

Figure 1.8 Arts display, Zanzibar Exhibition, 1905. Dr Spurrier is standing second from the left. The soap clock tower is visible at the back. ZNA: AV 4/12.

The Zanzibar Exhibition was deemed a great success by its organisers. Lyne was awarded the Third Order of Brilliant Star by the Sultan for his organisational endeavours and Zanzibar won by far the most prizes, although the Zanzibar-specific nature of many of the categories ensured this was virtually a pre-determined outcome. The German visitors were suitably struck by 'the presence of the Sultan, the wealth of magnificent costumes, [and] the presence of the Aga

Khan, ... [who] gave the disposition of the exhibition an unprecedented and attractive splendour'.¹⁴⁵

A reflective piece in the *Gazette* after the Exhibition reveals that the British were also humbled. The real highlight for them was the display from the Amani Research Centre in German East Africa: 'No settler, student of natural history or any one interested in East African progress, could have failed to detect in the carefully arranged exhibits the fruit of much laborious research which in time must prove of immense benefit to the country'.¹⁴⁶ This article described the Amani experimental station as 'the only properly equipped Biological-Agricultural experimental station in this part of the world'.

Especially admired were the quality of timbers, the mineral exhibits and the classification of specimens with kiSwahili and botanical names. The entertainment provided by the Tanga school musical band, was 'testimony of the success of the educational system of the German East Africa administration'.¹⁴⁷ The *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung* took pride in reporting that the Germans took 'the lion's share of attention and recognition'.¹⁴⁸ British administrators in Zanzibar sponsored prizes for industry, i.e. craftsmanship, and agriculture with a view to encouraging trade but the German displays celebrated the significant progress brought about by scientific research and education. Lack of investment in Zanzibar's education system, as noted earlier in the chapter, was a point picked up by Akers in his damning report of 1906.

In Zanzibar, the motivation to undertake agricultural research took time to realise. Lyne introduced experimental work in the early 1910s although his initial trials proved that few commercially viable products were suitable to the climate.¹⁴⁹ Spurrier was deeply struck by the need for a research institute for biology, agriculture and medicine, an enduring ambition that was included in his proposal for the Zanzibar Museum in 1919.

The Exhibition does not appear to have had any pronounced impact upon the export industry of Zanzibar, although expectations of an economic transformation were arguably unrealistic.¹⁵⁰ What is of greater significance in this discussion is how objects and spaces were reconfigured to acquire new meanings. Many of the territories represented had long been linked through Indian Ocean trade. However, European imperialism brought with it new forms of expression, such as exhibitions, which distilled this network into a single public space. The intertwining of the material and social world was a powerful exposition of colonial rule. Rewarding endeavour reasserted existing hierarchies and adapted rituals of performance for a new purpose. However, the performative elements, while doubtless impressive, failed to conceal the diminishing status of Zanzibar within

the region. The Exhibition reaffirmed, if there was any doubt, that Zanzibar's zenith lay in the past, the remnants of which were visible in its elaborate ritual culture and which would eventually be celebrated in the Museum display.

Two Early Museum Ventures

The idea of a permanent museum appears in the records several times over the next decade, a legacy typical of colonial fairs and exhibitions. Even during the planning stages of the Zanzibar Exhibition, the organisers intended to send examples of trade produce of the Protectorate after the event for permanent display in the Imperial Institute in London.¹⁵¹ Two projects in the decade after the exhibition merit further examination: Edward Clarke's failed museum project and the Health Office museum.

The first recorded museum proposal was championed by Edward Clarke, who as we have seen moved from his post as Head of the Africa department in the Foreign Office to become Agent and Consul-General in Zanzibar in 1909. He and his wife, Lena Milman, were both published authors with a lively interest in visual culture, architecture and history.¹⁵² Clarke was later praised in 1929 in the Indian newspaper, *Samachar*, for 'his singular energy' in improving Zanzibar, in particular through the development of roads and infrastructure.¹⁵³

Evidence for the first proposal for a museum can be found in a Minute written by Clarke while still at the Foreign Office in early 1908 in response to Akers's critical assessment of the Zanzibar Government. Clarke stated that during his visit to Zanzibar he had personally suggested to the Government the idea of an assembly rooms, museum and club in one building in the Victoria Gardens. Unfortunately for Clarke, 'Mr Akers is much against the proposal, for which I myself was largely responsible'.¹⁵⁴ There was a lack of consensus and Clarke consented to confining his project to 'the construction of Assembly Rooms and Museum in one in the Victoria Gardens, and the reorganisation of the said gardens on a somewhat larger scale'.¹⁵⁵ This joint scheme, however, is not mentioned again in the records. A gymnasium and small swimming pool were built in the Victoria Gardens for the town Government School in 1911 and the hall in the gardens was rebuilt by 1913 'for various entertainments'.¹⁵⁶

Once Clarke was installed as British Agent and Consul General in 1909, his fascination with the history of Zanzibar immediately revived, and he took 'frequent expeditions' around the islands to gain

a better knowledge of the territory.¹⁵⁷ He was one of the first to take an active interest in preserving Zanzibar's historical ruins; he commissioned a survey in 1909, and began to draft a 'Protection of Ruins' decree.¹⁵⁸ He hoped this legislation might preserve artefacts and prevent further dilapidation of the island's historic sites. One aspect of this planned legislation was to explain to Collectors and Assistant Collectors the historical importance of 'beads and fragments of pottery that are frequently to be found on the sea beach in the neighbourhood of ancient settlements'. He recommended that such objects be collected 'either themselves or through the natives' so they could be sent for examination in the British Museum.¹⁵⁹ It is unlikely that he was able to establish this network of officers and local people. Although the monuments survey was undertaken, the legislation remained in draft form and an Ancient Monuments Decree was not passed until 1927.

At the ruins of Mtoni Palace, former residence of Seyyid Said, Clarke's historical interest took physical form. He installed a 'large teak notice-board at the beginning of the Bamboo avenue, incised with an inscription giving the whole history of the place'.¹⁶⁰ Clarke drew on the memoirs of Seyyida Salme, the daughter of Seyyid Said who, following her notorious elopement and flight to Germany, had published vivid descriptions of her life at Mtoni in the harem.¹⁶¹ This notice-board outside Mtoni Palace probably represents the earliest attempt to interpret Zanzibar's historical monuments for the public, albeit in English. The board survived in situ until 1959, when it was replaced.¹⁶² In spite of his efforts to encourage his colleagues and the local population's interest in the island's historic sites, after his death such strides forward were regularly undermined. For example, during the First World War, a roof was built over the Mtoni ruins to convert the site into an oil store.¹⁶³

New evidence reveals that Clarke's plans for a museum were nearly realised shortly before his sudden death in February 1913. This fledgling project can be loosely reconstructed from correspondence between Sinclair, then Acting British Agent and Consul General, and the Foreign Office in July 1913, concerning the disposal of objects when the project was abandoned after Clarke's death. The building designated for this purpose, described by Sinclair as 'a museum', cannot be identified from the fragmentary evidence although he stated that it was to be converted into a boarding school for Arab boys.¹⁶⁴ Sinclair does not explain the reason for terminating the project, although Clarke's death and the likely cost seem probable causes.

It is clear from this correspondence that Clarke had begun acquiring artefacts in earnest. The only object referred to specifically

was a pair of silver sandals. The project was sufficiently advanced for Clarke to spend funds fitting the building with cupboards. Sinclair categorised the other objects into four groups: those that should 'by right' be in the custody of the Sultan; those that were likely to be the property of the ex-Sultan (the recently abdicated Ali bin Hamud); those Clarke had purchased himself; and finally, a range of historical documents, including original copies of the treaties with foreign powers. Sinclair proposed selling at auction those objects belonging to the ex-Sultan and those purchased by Clarke. Money received from the sale should be returned to the ex-Sultan and the Government respectively. The historic documents were placed in storage in the British Agency. Those objects deemed the property of the Sultan were 'handed over to the Sultan ... and His Highness has undertaken not to dispose of them but to regard them as heirlooms to be handed on to his successor'.¹⁶⁵

No further details of this building or the collection made by Clarke can at present be traced. What little can be surmised from Sinclair's summary is that Clarke's focus appears to have been upon nineteenth-century history and cultural artefacts relating to the Omani Arabs and the Sultanate, as well as Zanzibar's relationship with foreign powers. No description remains of the other exhibits. It is possible that a wider range of material may have been included; Clarke's request to the Collectors for fragments of pottery suggests his interests were broad.

The intended display of this collection can also be seen as a diplomatic and political move to flatter and enhance the prestige of the Sultanate. The policy of indirect rule could use cultural projections – displays, invented rituals and architecture – to present the Sultan as the figurehead of Government. The abdication of Sultan Ali bin Hamud, in 1911, ended the period of hostility and also provided Clarke with the opportunity to acquire objects while the former Sultan chose to remain in Europe. The accession in 1911 of Sultan Khalifa bin Harub, with whom the British were much impressed, restored harmonious relations. In keeping with trends in museums worldwide, however, Clarke's personal interest and enthusiasm drove the project.¹⁶⁶ His death brought about the administrative upheaval of the Colonial Office transfer and the nascent museum project fell by the wayside. It is notable that this drive to create a museum coincided with a similar movement in Dar es Salaam where a museum society was set up in 1911, with funds offered in 1912 by the German geographer Dr Hans Meyer for the construction.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, the proposed site was the residence of the deputy-governor, near the Botanical Gardens. Meyer intended it to 'give the best visual and widespread picture of the geographical feature of the Colony, its geology, climate, vegetation, game,

population and culture pattern'.¹⁶⁸ The intended location and subject matter suggest that, like in Zanzibar, dedicated individuals in prominent official roles were essential to fledgling colonial museum projects.

External circumstances, as in Zanzibar, halted this project: in the German East African case, due to the outbreak of war and the need for the proposed building for official purposes. The British in East Africa were well aware of the economic and agricultural progress made by the Germans, so clear in the 1905 Exhibition. It is possible that Clarke was attempting to keep apace in the cultural sphere as we have seen he had been interested some five years earlier in creating a museum. In both cases, unpredictable local and global events interrupted the development of museums across East Africa.

Returning to Zanzibar, Sinclair's letter indicated that the collection for Clarke's museum was dispersed before it opened. One month earlier, in June 1913, a description in the *Gazette* of the visit of Henry Belfield, the new Commissioner of the British East Africa, makes reference to a museum. Belfield was taken on an extensive tour of the town, which included 'the Law Courts, the Native Hospital, the Victoria Gardens, Health Office, Museum, Government Stables and Markets'.¹⁶⁹ It is probable that this refers not to Clarke's abandoned project but to the small museum established in 1913 by Dr William Mansfield Aders in a room adjacent to the Medical Department offices.¹⁷⁰

The position of Economic Zoologist was created in the early 1910s, with Dr Aders its first incumbent. Attached to the Health Office, he was employed to research the disease environment, a response by the Government to promote better agricultural research in Zanzibar – due in part to the German advances exhibited at the 1905 Exhibition. The aim was to increase economic productivity through an improvement in the health of workers and prevention of disease in agriculture. Aders collaborated closely with Spurrier, as Medical Officer for Health, and the two became close colleagues and friends, working together for over 20 years.

As soon as he arrived on the island Aders began to collect biological specimens, regularly sending birds to the British Museum (Natural History) for identification. In 1912 he established a museum and library attached to the Health Office. Its purpose was twofold: to provide a reference collection for the medical staff, and to compile information about insects and other threats to crops, should European planters increase agricultural production in Zanzibar. The museum did not aim 'to have a general collection of the Zanzibar fauna and flora, but that all specimens should have some direct economic value'.¹⁷¹

The *Guide to Zanzibar* of 1912 described the display.¹⁷² The exhibits illustrated the life cycle of pests that affected the crops of the islands, including weevils, termites and various beetles. Glass cases were used to display the insects that threatened humans and cattle, and an aquarium held fish that fed on mosquito larvae. As well as pest specimens, there were also examples of the economic products of the Protectorate, including pulses, grains, oils, sponges and semi-precious stones, showing some continuity with the aims of the 1905 Exhibition. The library contained a small number of periodicals and books. This overview makes clear Aders's stated aim to focus upon specimens with 'some direct economic value'. He continued to concentrate the collections on issues of productivity throughout the 1910s, rather than branching out to create a general natural history museum.

Inevitably the First World War limited the collecting and demonstration activities, but the annual reports indicate that Aders kept the museum functioning. Photographs and descriptive labels were added to the displays in 1915.¹⁷³ In that year, he reported that lectures and demonstrations had been given in the museum, in addition to those delivered by Spurrier in the Health Office.¹⁷⁴ The lecture attendees were teachers, 'advanced scholars' and subordinate staff of the Public Health department – all members of Zanzibar's growing educated class, mostly from Indian and Arab families. Lecture topics included mosquitoes, rats, house flies, bed bugs and hookworm.¹⁷⁵ From 1916, Aders's job title changed to Economic Biologist, expanding the scope of his work. After the war, specimens were sent to the Wellcome Bureau of Scientific Research in London.¹⁷⁶

By 1922, Aders described his institution as 'the Public Health Museum' and collaborated with the Director of Education to create pamphlets suitable for distribution.¹⁷⁷ The propaganda effort to spread awareness of public health measures was stepped up, with many more lectures delivered on the prevention of malaria and hookworm. These were made more comprehensible by the use of visual aids such as charts, pamphlets and lantern slides from the Rockefeller Institute in New York. On the understanding that these collections would soon move to the forthcoming Zanzibar Museum building, Aders built up the collections enthusiastically. The repeated delays in the construction meant the expanding collection was squeezed into the original building until relocation into the completed Museum in 1925.

No records indicate the actual numbers of visitors or the scale of the Public Health Museum. In 1923, Sinclair, then British Resident, referred to this useful collection as providing the foundation of the collection for the Zanzibar Museum. It is certainly true that its continued existence throughout the 1910s had a profound influence

upon the composition of the Zanzibar Museum collections. The scientific bias and involvement of the two doctors continued once the new Museum opened.

This chapter has traced the myriad strands that set the scene for the creation of a museum in 1919. There was an existing culture of display and reverence for valuable objects, which was absorbed by British administrators and expressed in their official and private residences. The Exhibition of 1905 showed that all communities could be called upon as donors and visitors. Clarke's aborted museum project and Aders's medical collection maintained the idea of the usefulness of a museum amongst the British officers, many of whom remained in Zanzibar throughout the 1900s and 1910s. The war had an unexpected impact upon East African museum projects – it interrupted the German project on the mainland and its cessation provided the chance for Zanzibar to take the lead. The decision to create a public display of objects and specimens after the war would result in the most monumental cultural project undertaken by the Government, and one that reflected the self-conception of the colonial ruling elite. The collections were to be housed in the most vivid example of cultural fusion, the Museum building, which forms the subject of the next chapter.

- 1 ZNA: DF 9/9, Richard Crofton to Ailsa Nicol Smith, undated letter, c. 1936–42.
- 2 See Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 88–116.
- 3 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 26.
- 4 For analysis of the heterogeneity and complexities of British communities in Kenya, see Kennedy, *Islands of White*; John Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Home County and African Frontier', in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons Over the Seas*, ed. Robert A. Bickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74–111.
- 5 Analysis of local society in the post-abolition period includes Fair, *Pastime and Politics* and Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*.
- 6 Rennell Rodd and Arthur Hardinge both promoted a gradual pace of change, for example Rodd's response to Anti-Slavery Society: TNA: FO107/5, Zanzibar despatches to Foreign Office, 31 December 1893, Fo. 310. See also Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 166; J. R. Mlahagwa and A. J. Temu, 'The Decline of the Landlords, 1873–1963', in *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule*, ed. Sheriff and Ferguson, 153; William C. Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 96–7.
- 7 Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya 1890–1925* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 134.
- 8 Mlahagwa and Temu, 'The Decline of the Landlords', 160.
- 9 Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, 125–72; Mlahagwa and Temu, 'The Decline of the Landlords', 143.
- 10 Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 98.
- 11 Jacques Depulchin, 'The Transition from Slavery, 1873–1914', in *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule*, ed. Sheriff and Ferguson, 15.
- 12 ZNA: BA 18/2, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1909, 26.
- 13 TNA: FO 881/9839, Report by Consul General to Foreign Secretary, February 1911, 78.
- 14 Mathews was a domineering, uncompromising character, almost a stereotype of the high Victorian imperialist. His letters testify to his close relationship with the Arab elite and he was an important intermediary between elite groups. Only one biography has been written of him: Robert Nunez Lyne, *An Apostle of Empire: Being the Life of Sir Lloyd William Mathews K.C.M.G.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936).
- 15 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 66.
- 16 Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times*, 206.
- 17 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 75.
- 18 Rennell Rodd, *Social and Diplomatic Memories, 1884–1893* (London: Edward Arnold, 1922), 289. A *baraza* describes a communal meeting, usually outside a house at dusk.
- 19 Ann Estella Cave, *Three Journeys* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1928), 85.
- 20 Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 171.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Buildings had been constructed on Prison Island with the intention of moving the town gaol there in the mid-1890s. This complex became a quarantine station in the late 1890s with fear of disease spreading from India during the construction of the Uganda Railway. When not in use as a quarantine station, European residents used the island as a health resort. Estella Cave records visiting Prison Island when Spurrier was in residence in one of the bungalows: Cave, *Three Journeys*, 55. He is visible in another photograph from the Caves' excursion.
- 23 George Cave was at that time a barrister. He later became Home Secretary and was ennobled as Viscount Cave.
- 24 For examples in India, see William Dalrymple, 'Personal Encounters: Europeans in South Asia', in *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer (London: V&A Publications, 2004), 156–69.
- 25 ZNA: CA 1/8, William Aders to Spurrier, citing letter from Sinclair, 21 April 1930; Speech for visit of Dr Charlesworth, *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1836, 2 April 1927, 67; Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 171.
- 26 ZNA: CA 1/7, Luiz Andrade to Spurrier, 16 May 1929. Cursetji Cowasji was Registrar to the Sultan's Government, serving for 27 years before his death in 1906, and was Mathews's 'right hand man': Cave, *Three Journeys*, 45. Bissell uses the career of Andrade, who rose to Collector from Veterinary Officer, to exemplify the lack of expertise in the high-ranking

officers in the Sultan's Government: Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 101.

27 ZNA: DF 7/1, Robert Lyne to Ailsa Nicol Smith, 24 July 1939.

28 Ibid.

29 ZNA: AB 75/4, Consul General to potential subscribers, 25 August 1902.

30 ZNA: AB 75/4, Mathew Memorial Committee to subscribers, 18 October 1905.

31 ZNA: AB 75/4, Resident to Chief Secretary, 1 October 1924; Chief Secretary to Director of Agriculture, 9 October 1935.

32 ZNA: AB 75/4, Mathews Memorial file: the last recorded instance took place with the Resident and Dr Taylor in 1953.

33 T. O. Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211.

34 David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Introduction: Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects', in *Colonial Lives across the British Empire*, ed. Lambert and Lester, 1–31; Tamson Pietsch, 'A British Sea: Making Sense of Global Space in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 03 (2010): 423–46.

35 Introduction to Rogers's Collection: <http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0115%2FY30468A-I> accessed 1 October 2011.

36 RSCL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 34.

37 TNA: FO 403/377, Consul General to Head of Africa Section, Foreign Office, 2 September 1905.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 TNA: FO 403/377, Sultan Ali bin Hamud to Foreign Secretary, 26 October 1905.

41 Many letters to the Foreign Office in this period attest to the difficulties the British had with Sultan Ali, see TNA: FO 403/377.

42 For discussion of the potential ostracism associated with education for Indians, see A. Martin Wainwright, *'The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain, 1858–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 195–232.

43 TNA: FO 403/377, Memorandum by Head of Africa Section, Foreign Office, 30 April 1906, referring to the Sultan Ali's letter of 13 March 1906 to the Foreign Minister.

44 In October 1905, Cave recommended to the Foreign Minister a rationalisation of the administration creating the roles of Resident and Secretary, the basic model adopted in 1913: TNA: FO 403/377, Consul General to the Foreign Minister, 9 October 1905.

45 ZNA: BK 1/26, Assistant Under-Secretary, Foreign Office, to Consul General, 26 July 1907.

46 Ernst and Pati describe the honours, *darbars* and titles awarded to Indian princes as part of the hegemonic strategy which 'encouraged Indian rulers to conceive of themselves, against the odds of their actual political impotence, as potent heads of independent states': in 'People, Princes and Colonialism', Ernst and Pati, eds, *India's Princely States*, 4.

47 ZNA: BK 1/26, Akers, Report on the Financial, Commercial and Economic Situation of Zanzibar, 12 February 1907, 40.

48 Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 187.

49 Ibid., 202.

50 Ibid., 205.

51 For example, Clarke introduced the Town Council. See Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 129.

52 ZNA: DF 7/1, Lyne to Nicol Smith, 24 July 1939.

53 Ralph D. Paine, *In Zanzibar* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1925), 41.

54 Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Allen Lane, 1994); Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 274. Richard Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* and his publication on his travels to Zanzibar may have further conflated these two images. See also Dane K. Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

55 Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 21.

56 This concept draws on phenomena identified by analyses of the representations of India and Egypt. Amongst the wide literature on this, see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*; Carol A.

Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (April 1989): 209–10; Paul Starkey and Janet Starkey, eds, *Travellers in Egypt* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998). I explore this further in Sarah Longair, 'the untrammelled fancy of the scenic artist': Imagining and Encountering Zanzibar in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century' in *Britain and the Narration of Travel in the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming) ed. Kate Hill. See also essays in: Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, eds, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

57 Examples include John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1863); David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and Its Tributaries: And of the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa, 1858–1864* (London: John Murray, 1865); Henry M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa; Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1872).

58 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (London: James Currey, 1995); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent', *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (October 1985): 166–203; Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, 140.

59 Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times*, 94.

60 Comic operas performed in 1880 to 1920 in Britain and the United States included 'the Sultan of Zanzibar' and 'Zanzibar': Ring Lardner and Harry Schmidt, *Zanzibar: A Comic Opera in Two Acts* (Niles, MI: F. D. Cook, 1903); Martyn Downer, *The Sultan of Zanzibar: The Bizarre World and Spectacular Hoaxes of Horace de Vere Cole* (London: Black Spring, 2010), 49. Popular ragtime songs were Charles Ancliffe, 'Down in Zanzibar: Two-Step', London, 1917, Joseph Lamb's 'My Queen of Zanzibar', 1904, in Joseph F. Lamb, *A Little Lost Lamb: Piano Music by Joseph F. Lamb* (Oak Forest, IL: Ragtime Press, 2005) and John Philip Sousa's 'A Typical Tune of Zanzibar' from his operetta farce *El Capitan*: www.musicaltheatreguide.com/composers/sousa/elcapitain.htm accessed 3 January 2011.

61 Mai Palmberg, '"A Gentleman Went to Zanzibar": Racism and Humanism Revisited', in *Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe*, ed. Mai Palmberg (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2001), 98.

62 David Livingstone, *Last Journals in Central Africa from 1865 to His Death*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1874), 7; Burton, *Zanzibar*, 32–3.

63 Burton, *Zanzibar*, 32.

64 Pearce, *Zanzibar: The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa*, 146; H. V. Lanchester, *Zanzibar: A Study in Tropical Town Planning* (Cheltenham: Burrow, 1923), 29.

65 Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 151.

66 Richard Harding Davis, *The Congo and Coasts of Africa* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 5.

67 Harding-Davis perceived architecture as a marker of civilization: William Gleason, *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 114.

68 Harding Davis, *The Congo and Coasts of Africa*, 211–12.

69 Lévi-Strauss describes the deception created by travel literature: 'Such books preserve the illusion of something that no longer exists but yet must be assumed to exist'. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Criterion Books, 1961), 38.

70 James Frederick Elton, *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* (London: John Murray, 1879), 47.

71 Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', 215.

72 In Kenya, Kennedy describes how 'paramountcy was dependent upon constant and elaborate mechanisms of control': Kennedy, *Islands of White*, 187.

73 Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 102.

74 Ibid., 101.

75 Ibid.

76 Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 213.

- 77 A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, 'Introduction', in *Tales from the Dark Continent: Images of British Colonial Africa in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Allen (London: Macdonald Futura, 1980), 68.
- 78 Ethel Younghusband, *Glimpses of East Africa and Zanzibar* (London: John Long, 1910), 227.
- 79 For further discussion of the significance and meaning of the English club in Kenya and India, see Kennedy, *Islands of White*, 179–80; Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability and the Colonial Public Sphere', in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 183–200.
- 80 RCSL: RCMS 162/1/1, Wilson, 'An Agriculturalist in East Africa 1933–1964', 8; Rhodes House Library, Oxford University (RHL hereafter), Papers of Helen Lilian Haylett, MSS.Afr.s.1946/1, 'An Account of my Two Tours as Office Assistant in the Secretariat, Zanzibar, 1935–1942', 9.
- 81 *Gazette*, Vol. XVI, No. 820, 16 October 1907, 2.
- 82 TNA: FO 881/9839, Consul General to Foreign Minister, February 1911, 10.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 84 *Ibid.*.
- 85 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 67.
- 86 TNA: FO 881/9839, Consul General to Foreign Minister, February 1911, 11.
- 87 Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 213.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 189.
- 89 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 93, 95; Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 104.
- 90 Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar under the Foreign Office*, 191.
- 91 Fergus Wilson gives several examples in his memoirs: RCSL: RCMS 162/1/1: Wilson, 'An Agriculturalist in East Africa 1933–1964'.
- 92 Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times*; Charles Eliot, *The East Africa Protectorate* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905).
- 93 Abdul Sheriff, *Zanzibar Stone Town: An Architectural Exploration* (Zanzibar: Gallery Publications, 2008), 78.
- 94 Abdul Sheriff, 'The Spatial Dichotomy of Swahili Towns: The Case of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa c. 1750–2000*, ed. Andrew Burton (Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 2002), 66. Prita Meier describes these as Swahili 'logics of display': Meier, 'Objects on the Edge', 9.
- 95 Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean*, 163; Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*, 38; 195.
- 96 Meier, 'Objects on the Edge', 10.
- 97 Meier also describes how certain ceramics were believed by particular groups to have spiritual and protective qualities: *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 98 Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 96.
- 99 Meier refers to an 'aura of exotic imperial cosmopolitanism' around Kirk's display which gave a 'specific sense of imperial mobility for European residents in East Africa since it intersected European, East African, and South Asian cultural worlds': Meier, 'Objects on the Edge', 14; 15.
- 100 Robin D. Jones notes that in fact Indian domestic space became increasingly Anglicized: Robin D. Jones, *Interiors of Empire: Objects, Space and Identity within the Indian Subcontinent, c. 1800–1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 91; 103.
- 101 Cave, *Three Journeys*, 39.
- 102 For further discussion of the social context of hunting, see Edward I. Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006); John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', 215–9.
- 103 Museum label in the House of Wonders, Zanzibar National Museum. Prestholdt discusses the growing popularity of European portraiture in Zanzibar, Prestholdt,

104 James de Vere Allen, 'The Kiti Cha Enzi and Other Swahili Chairs', *African Arts* 22, no. 3 (May 1989): 54–88; Mwalim A. Mwalim, *Doors of Zanzibar* (London: HSP Publications, 1998). One of the chairs in this photograph was likely to have been inherited by Cave on Rogers's departure. Cave's wife donated it to the British Museum in 1962. It is at the time of writing on display in the British Museum's Sainsbury African Galleries.

105 Sarah Longair, 'Recovering and Reframing the Regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu in British Colonial Zanzibar', *Museum History Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 149–70.

106 The arrangement is similar to those at the Stanley and African Exhibition in London in 1890 as described in Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 71, 74.

107 For an extended version of this section, see Sarah Longair, "A Grand Show" for East Africa: the Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905", <http://explusultra.wun.ac.uk/images/issue3/2012Longair.pdf>.

108 In the rich and extensive literature on imperial and colonial exhibitions, there are an increasing number of studies examining exhibitions in Africa and India including Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Jennifer Robinson, 'Johannesburg's 1936 Empire Exhibition: Interaction, Segregation and Modernity in a South African City', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 3 (September 2003): 759–89.

109 ZNA: BA 18/1, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1906, 20; Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 24.

110 ZNA: BA 18/1, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1906, 20.

111 Ibid., 21.

112 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 708, 23 August 1905, 3.

113 A. B. C. Sibthorpe, *The History of Sierra Leone* (London: Routledge, 1970), ix; *Industrial Exhibition at Sierra Leone, 1865: Its History, French and English Catalogues, Appointment of Jurors, Etc.* (London: Hatchard and Co., 1866); 'South African International Exhibition', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 80 (16 September 1876): 376.

114 *Gazette*, Vol. XII, No. 600, 29 July 1903, 2; *Gazette*, Vol. XIII, No. 654, 10 August 1904, 2–3; *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 683, 1 March 1905, 2.

115 *Gazette*, 1 March 1905, p 2.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 William C. Bissell, 'Colonial Constructions: Historicizing Debates on Civil Society in Africa', in John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, eds, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 128.

119 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 693, 10 May 1905, 2; Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 2.

120 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 689, 12 April 1905, 2.

121 *Gazette*, 10 May 1905, 2.

122 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 692, 3 May 1905, 3.

123 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 697, 7 June 1905, 4. In contrast, in India, South Asian and European exhibition experts travelled and selected items for display: Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 50–54.

124 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 711, 13 September 1905, 3.

125 *Gazette*, 12 April 1905, 2.

126 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 709, 30 August 1905, 2.

127 My thanks to Prof. Sheriff for highlighting the significance of Sherif Memsaab's work.

128 *Gazette*, 13 September 1905, 3.

129 Bissell, 'Colonial Constructions', 129.

130 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 698, 14 June 1905, 3. Dance was a central part of Swahili life, performed at the time of initiations and festivals, by various dance associations. See Laura Fair, 'Identity, Difference, and Dance: Female Initiation in Zanzibar, 1890 to 1930', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 17, no. 3 (January 1996): 146–72.

131 My thanks to William Bissell for an enlightening correspondence about this issue.

132 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 708, 23 August 1905, 3.

133 Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs* (London: Scholar Press, 1983), 12.

134 *Gazette*, 23 August 1905, 5.

- 135 *Gazette*, 13 September 1905, 3.
- 136 *Ibid.*
- 137 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 138 *Gazette*, Vol. XV, No. 780, 9 January 1907, 2.
- 139 Burton Benedict notes that ritual objects and works of art were common in exhibitions in Europe and the USA: Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs*, 19.
- 140 Robinson suggests that visitors were empowered by allowing them to choose their routes and interpretations: Robinson, 'Johannesburg's 1936 Empire Exhibition', 761.
- 141 Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 13.
- 142 Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 10–11.
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‘Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair’: Building the Peace Memorial Museum, 1919–1925

Only days before the Peace Memorial Museum was due to open in November 1925, the Chief Secretary, Vincent Kirkham, wrote an urgent personal note to Claud Hollis, the British Resident. Kirkham wished to suggest a kiSwahili name for the building to be announced at the opening ceremony. He had recently heard locals referring to it as ‘Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair’ [Mr Sinclair’s mosque] which ‘passes muster as well as most but this peeves Spurrier tremendously and is for other reasons objectionable’.¹ In its place he thought ‘Bet el Amani’ [House of Peace] more suitable. Hollis agreed that this was much more appropriate and it remains the official name for the building to this day.²

This fascinating coda in the story of the Museum’s construction exemplifies the complexities inherent in the transmission of metropolitan institutions to the colonies and their reception by local populations. The comparison to a mosque recalls Sheets-Pyenson’s description of Victorian natural history museums as ‘cathedrals of science’ and quasi-religious spaces in which to pay reverence to and absorb knowledge.³ Commentators at the time and since have regularly likened the Zanzibar Museum building to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul due to its horizontal emphasis and large dome.⁴ Yet the absence of domed mosques in Zanzibar makes this reported local name intriguing. Indeed, one of Sinclair’s motives in creating such a monument was to ‘improve’ the skyline, which, as we have seen, was not deemed sufficiently ‘Eastern’ by its European residents.

The chaotic process of construction is obscured by the apparently unified design, one which seemed to refer directly to well-known precedents. Sinclair in fact employed a multitude of cultural influences: the design was not simply an act of stylistic mimicry, of either an Ottoman mosque or a Byzantine church. Close examination of the hitherto unknown initial design and its eventual form reveal this complex story. The design and construction process was long drawn-out and fraught with difficulties, both financial and structural, and required ongoing justification of the underlying purpose of the Museum. The tragic collapse during construction had significant long-

term ramifications for the function of the building and its interpretation. The drastic lowering of the dome due to the removal of the first floor enhanced the horizontal emphasis, rendering its appearance more like that of a mosque than was ever originally intended. The problematic building process has much in common with those experienced by British architects in the informal empire in the Near East, where Crinson describes the history of the architecture as ‘largely a history of the disappointment or insufficiency of orientalist ambitions’.⁵ The Museum building epitomises the challenges of colonial architecture through the attempts to overcome difficulties posed by the climate, building materials and the overly ambitious design of an amateur architect.

The chief architect of the Museum, John Houston Sinclair, is the central character in this investigation.⁶ As a key figure in the colonial administration who keenly took on responsibility for new building designs in Zanzibar, Sinclair dominated the architectural vision of the Protectorate. His contribution to Zanzibar’s cityscape has been briefly discussed by Abdul Sheriff and other historians and urban planners, but his building designs remain critically understudied. Dean Sinclair’s useful overview charts the architect’s career and his role within town planning. The concentration upon on a single building here deploys a wide range of sources to reveal the dilemmas and compromises inherent in colonial building projects.

The absence of architectural expertise in many smaller colonial territories left building design either in the hands of amateur enthusiasts and members of Public Works Departments, who did not necessarily have architectural training, or to be undertaken by architects in London. Designs published in *The Builder* and the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* by London firms for construction in the Empire chart this process.⁷ While it was typical of administrators across the empire to hold several positions of responsibility, Sinclair’s combined roles as British Resident and chief architect are particularly significant.⁸ At various times he held the posts of Chief Secretary, Acting British Agent, Acting British Resident and finally rose to become British Resident over a period of 25 years and was therefore intimately involved in the government of the island. We must therefore thoroughly examine Sinclair’s architectural designs within the context of the power he held in government. Through his buildings, Sinclair invented a visual identity appropriate for British rule in Zanzibar, which drew on styles from the various communities on the island and his own experience and imagination. No closer relationship could exist in the dissemination of the official image than the British Resident designing the most ambitious building to be created in the Protectorate. Sinclair’s lengthy experience in

Zanzibar as an administrator and part-time architect culminated respectively in his appointment as British Resident in 1922 and in the creation of the Museum building. These commissions ought to have crowned his period of service in the island to which he was devoted. In the event, however, neither proved to be an unqualified success, as will be discussed in this chapter.

Sinclair's designs for Zanzibar incorporated multiple cultural references, to 'Moorish' (i.e. North African and Spanish) and Near Eastern sources, as readily as to those found locally in Zanzibar, creating a synthesis that he and his fellow administrators deemed suitable for a British colony with a predominantly Muslim population. Unlike Orientalist literary projects bound for the European market, the diverse audience in Zanzibar, the competing requirements of local patrons and the challenges of the local environment were key factors in determining the architectural imperial vision particular to Zanzibar.⁹ Sinclair's various designs came to express the political power of the Protectorate; his buildings provided a backdrop to the regular ceremonies and 'performances of empire' enacted by the Arab and British administration.¹⁰ This interpretation must be carefully interrogated and qualified, however, as it suggests a greater coherence of motivation than perhaps was the case. This chapter will demonstrate that the Museum building in particular was ultimately a compromise, reflecting a common theme in colonial history in which local circumstances intervened and trumped ideological clarity.

As Bremner's landmark study, *Imperial Gothic*, has shown, colonial architecture is a vital component of 'British' architecture, and can best be understood by reconstructing the networks of communication and influence transmitted between Britain and her colonial territories and within the Empire itself.¹¹ In this context, this chapter will refine the existing broad, sweeping judgements of Sinclair's work through an examination of his architectural training in London. Earlier studies have paid insufficient attention to this formative period in his life. The careful analysis of Sinclair's designs and the construction of the museum in Zanzibar presents important new material which will expose the fractures behind the perceived monumentality of the building. The periodisation of this discussion is also important: architects designing for territories acquired in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew on pre-existing examples elsewhere in well-established colonies – India being a particular source of influence within the Indian Ocean world including East Africa – but they continued to respond to or knowingly reject global architectural trends, incorporating those elements deemed appropriate to the locality.

This chapter will therefore consider Sinclair's training and pay

particular attention to the first building he worked on in East Africa: Mombasa Cathedral, a building noted by P. J. Frankl as highly significant within East African colonial architecture.¹² Although nearly 20 years passed between the design of this cathedral and the Peace Memorial Museum, it represents a vital stylistic precedent. Sinclair's memoirs, the buildings themselves and the few remaining designs from the Zanzibar Archives form the principal source material through which to trace the development and meaning of his bold eclectic style. While his memoirs are a crucial source of information, he made tantalisingly sparse references to his architectural endeavours. The main body of the chapter will closely examine the design and construction process, and conclude with a discussion of the reception of Sinclair's design.

'An Embryo Architect' in Late Nineteenth-Century London

Having shown aptitude for drawing as a young boy, John Sinclair undertook an apprenticeship in an architect's practice near his home on the Isle of Wight. At the age of 19 in the early 1890s, he moved to London to begin his formal training in the offices of John Loughborough Pearson. This notable late Victorian architect was a leading figure in the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival movement and Pearson embraced a rigorous historicist approach to design that became progressive and inventive in his middle years.¹³ Truro Cathedral was one of the most celebrated of his many designs and was an ongoing project throughout the 1880s and 1890s, during the time of Sinclair's training. William Caröe, one of Pearson's most acclaimed pupils, described the experience of training under Pearson. The elder architect placed great emphasis on the importance of form and structure, and simultaneously encouraged his pupils to develop knowledge of history and archaeology.¹⁴ For Pearson, form, meaning, proportion and outline were paramount; details could be added later. During the time of Sinclair's training in the early 1890s, Pearson designed a unique and unusual building: the Ta Braxia chapel in Malta, a 16-sided chapel surmounted by a dome on a high central drum ([Figure 2.1](#)). This design is one of few examples for which Pearson used a dome form, and it shows inspiration from Byzantine sources, a particularly fashionable style during the 1890s.¹⁵ Not only does the chapel demonstrate the range of Pearson's historical research, it could have influenced Sinclair when he later came to design his own domed structure with significant Byzantine overtones for the Zanzibar Museum. Crinson has noted how British interest in Byzantine architecture during the Victorian era focused upon the 'the meanings

of its cultural synthesis', borne as it was out of a Christian tradition located in the East. As such, inspiration and references to Byzantine sources were readily picked up by architects designing for the colonial world.¹⁶

Figure 2.1 Ta Braxia chapel, Malta, completed 1896, designed by J. L. Pearson.

Sinclair's description of his training indicates that he examined the works of other contemporary architects:

It was while with him [Pearson] that I learnt to be able to distinguish between good and bad design, making friends with several of the other assistants and pupils who were very kind to a young aspirant, taking me round to see the best work of Norman Shaw and other famous men. This was probably the most valuable part of my training.¹⁷

Sinclair's admiration for Richard Norman Shaw, another important late nineteenth-century architect, is notable. Shaw was widely regarded in the 1890s as one of the great British architects of the period, and he had a direct influence upon Edwin Lutyens, arguably the most gifted architect for the colonies.¹⁸ Shaw also favoured references to the past, but his particular talent enabled him to merge architectural elements from a range of periods and styles gracefully.¹⁹ This process of architectural eclecticism had been popularised in the 1850s by Alexander J. B. Beresford Hope, who encouraged architects to incorporate a wide range of stylistic sources, chronologically and geographically, to produce a truly progressive and modern vision.²⁰ In a speech in Oxford in 1846 discussing the development of church designs for the expanding empire, Beresford Hope highlighted the need to look beyond Europe for inspiration: 'we must penetrate to the East and her venerable hereditary uses ... we must be as familiar with San Clemente, Santa Sophia and the church of the Holy Sepulchre, as with Heslington and York Minster'.²¹

This flexible eclecticism, as exemplified by Shaw, was therefore believed to be suited to Victorian needs both in Great Britain and across the British colonial world, from Canada and Australia to Hong Kong and India.²² It found most potent form in the Indo-Saracenic style in South Asia, debates over which were frequent in late nineteenth-century architectural circles.²³ As a trainee in the offices of one of the foremost architects of the day, Sinclair may well have been exposed to such discussions.

It should be recalled that Sinclair experienced London during the period of high imperialism of the late nineteenth century. This was reflected across the urban fabric of the city and explicitly in the monuments erected, such as Cleopatra's Needle brought from Alexandria, and architecturally through the development of

institutions that celebrated and represented the Empire, such as the South Kensington museums, the Crystal Palace at Sydenham and the Imperial Institute.²⁴ Sinclair's memoirs describe a lively social scene and network, with visits to the theatre, cultural events and attending debates at the House of Commons.²⁵ The image of empire, through its monuments, ceremonies and buildings, upon an impressionable young man could be profound.²⁶

Although Sinclair enjoyed what London had to offer culturally, he was unsatisfied with architectural training, being unconvinced of his prospects of success.²⁷ He left Pearson's practice to join friends in the newly established Audit Office for the Crown Colonies:

I was interested in my work as an embryo architect, but having little hope of emulating Sir Christopher Wren, and the idea of going abroad appealing to me, I accepted the offer of a post in the new department.²⁸

After a period of unchallenging office work, where he recalled playing cricket in the long corridors of the department, he was offered the post in 1895 of Local Auditor for British East Africa based in Mombasa. He travelled to East Africa via Port Said and Djibouti – his first direct experience of Arabia and the Near East. Like the majority of officers of his generation departing London in the 1890s, Sinclair maintained a steady conviction in the value of the imperial mission, which he retrospectively defended in his memoirs.²⁹

‘Sufficiently Arabesque’: Designing Mombasa Cathedral

Sinclair's first building designs on his arrival in Mombasa in 1895 are important early essays in the development of his eclectic building style. The case of Mombasa Cathedral is a useful example of the relationship between metropolitan design and construction within the Empire. In his memoirs, Sinclair recorded how his experience as an architect was soon put to use:

There being no one at Mombasa who knew anything about architecture, as soon as it was found that I had had some training in that profession, I was frequently asked to exercise my knowledge and, during my time there, designed a house for the Sub Commissioner ... several other small houses, the Law Courts and, not long before leaving, the Mombasa Cathedral.³⁰

The law courts and houses are more conventional colonial structures and less informative in the context of this discussion. Mombasa Cathedral is, in contrast, a remarkable building and a highly formative one for Sinclair (Figure 2.2).³¹

Sinclair's precise contribution to Mombasa Cathedral is unclear. At

the time of the Cathedral's dedication in 1905, the Mombasa-based *African Standard* explained that Sinclair had been brought in after the original designs by the London-based firm of Messrs Christian and Purday were set aside as too expensive.³² According to the *African Standard* article, Sinclair 'most kindly undertook to alter them [the designs]'.³³ In another source, the Bishop of Mombasa, Alfred Tucker recalls commissioning Sinclair to sketch a plan for a new cathedral in 1898.³⁴ By 1900, according to Tucker, Sinclair had created new plans for the building even though he was by that time already stationed in Zanzibar. The extent of Sinclair's alterations has yet to be decisively established. The *Gazette* in Zanzibar described the building as being 'from an English design, modified in some important particulars by Mr Sinclair'.³⁵ Tucker's recollections imply a more fundamental contribution. The process may have been similar to the design and construction of Christ Church Cathedral in Zanzibar in the 1870s. In this case, Charles Hayward's London architectural firm is credited with the design, but it was in fact based closely upon a sketch by Edward Steere, Bishop of Zanzibar.³⁶ Steere personally oversaw the building's construction and continued to refine and alter the design. It is possible that in a comparable fashion, Sinclair's sketches were sent to London for formal drafting and then readjusted when the design returned to Mombasa.

Figure 2.2 Mombasa Cathedral, opened in 1905.

With knowledge of his later work, Sinclair's contribution to the detail and ornamentation is instantly recognisable, whether or not he made fundamental changes to the building's plan. One of the few passages in his memoirs where he discussed the influences behind his architectural design relates to Mombasa Cathedral:

Not then having the experience which I have since gained while living in Tangier of the beautiful work done by the Moors in Spain and Morocco, I am afraid that this is far from being a masterpiece but it is, perhaps, sufficiently Arabesque not to seem out of place in an old Arab town.³⁷

This revealing passage, explicitly written with hindsight, provides critical evidence of the intentions behind Sinclair's architectural style. He wanted his buildings to harmonise with the 'old Arab town' by incorporating 'sufficiently Arabesque' design elements rather than relying solely upon European forms. Most notable here is his belief that Spain and Morocco had the finest examples of 'Arabesque', which Sinclair believed could be applied throughout the Islamic and Arab world. Given that he had not yet visited Spain and North Africa, these impressions may well have been drawn from his time in London, whether through visiting the Crystal Palace or examining plates from

the publications of designers such as Owen Jones, which were readily available in architectural offices.³⁸ Tellingly, by the time of writing his memoirs in the 1950s, Sinclair had made his home in Tangier, as it reminded him and his wife of Zanzibar in the 1900s.³⁹ He continued to seek the essence of the 'old Arab town' that he had first encountered at the turn of the century.

A writer in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* commented on the completed structure of Mombasa Cathedral: 'The general effect of the building, of which the extreme height is 108 ft., is strikingly Eastern'.⁴⁰ Sinclair later described his own designs as 'Saracenic'.⁴¹ In Mombasa Cathedral we can see the origins of his eclectic version of East African Saracenicism. Influence from Steere's Christ Church Cathedral in Zanzibar is likely. Sinclair visited Zanzibar en route to his first posting in Mombasa in 1895. There the young administrator would have seen the cathedral, constructed in the 1870s, and one of the first British buildings in East Africa to use local elements in its design (Figure 2.3). Bishop Steere had drawn on a range of sources for this design: African, Islamic, Asian and European. He had a particular preference for Byzantine elements, reflected in his other ecclesiastical works in Zanzibar.⁴² Early on in the design process, Steere proposed a series of domes for Christ Church, perhaps intending to draw comparison with San Marco in Venice.⁴³ There are clear similarities between the Zanzibar and Mombasa cathedrals, for example the tall narrow windows and polylobed arches in triple groups which Sinclair included repeatedly for Mombasa Cathedral in registers of varying sizes.

Figure 2.3 Christ Church Cathedral, Zanzibar, construction supervised by Edward Steere, third Bishop of Zanzibar, completed 1880s.

The significant difference between the two cathedrals is the use of the dome in Mombasa. Based around a cruciform plan, the building has a traditional cathedral layout with a low dome supported by an unusual crenellated octagonal drum. Rounded crenellations were characteristic of Arab buildings constructed on the East African coast, a product of the lengthy cultural exchange with Arabia.⁴⁴ The form proliferated in the eighteenth century, with the increasing number of Omani-style palaces built in towns such as Lamu, Mombasa and Zanzibar. Crenellations were used by Steere on Christ Church Cathedral in Zanzibar: notably they did not feature on the drawing by Hayward in London but seem to have been added by Steere in situ.⁴⁵ For Mombasa Cathedral, Sinclair placed the crenellations at the base of the dome, similar to the rounded east end of Christ Church. The crenellated entrance porch with wide pointed arches is reminiscent of European Neo-Gothic design. I will suggest later in the chapter that

the composition and arrangement of the façades of Mombasa Cathedral can be seen as prototypes for the original design for the Peace Memorial Museum.

The incorporation of these elements represents Sinclair's first attempt at a composite architectural style that fused European, Arab and East African forms. Although the users of the Cathedral would primarily be Europeans and local converts to Christianity, the building was a prominent expression both of religious belief and, more broadly, of colonial intentions for British East Africa, a protectorate at that time. Frankl describes it as corresponding with the 'Swahili-Islamic' vernacular of the city. It certainly had a powerful impact upon the British community as Reverend B. G. O'Rorke, chaplain to the armed forces, explained after his visit:

A well-known British officer, who visited this cathedral with me, and who knew Mombasa in the [eighteen] eighties when the present cathedral close was mere jungle, remarked that it convinced him more than ever that we English are destined to rule the world.⁴⁶

Impressive monuments in which the British could take pride sustained their imperial identity and duty – the 'imagined community' given physical form in bricks and mortar, embodying the overlapping global networks of empire and Anglicanism.⁴⁷ Perceptions of the building by the local population were not recorded.⁴⁸ Sinclair incorporated local styles, although this does not mean he was necessarily attempting to appeal to the indigenous community. Rather, he hoped to create a 'sufficiently Arabesque' spirit for a monument in the East African townscape. O'Rorke's quotation suggests that one of the most significant purposes in the construction of prominent British buildings was their role as symbols which ideologically empowered the British community itself, reinforcing their sense of purpose.

Mombasa Cathedral was finally dedicated on 31 May 1905, and was described in the *Zanzibar Gazette* as 'a striking erection' and the effect of the interior as 'very fine and imposing'.⁴⁹ The *African Standard* was more effusive in its praise: 'He [Sinclair] has succeeded completely, both in giving Mombasa a Cathedral building which receives unqualified praise on all sides, and also in keeping the cost of the structure within the limits of the funds of subscribers'.⁵⁰ Financial constraints, as always, determined the final design and keeping within the required budget was a notable criterion of success. The British community of Mombasa expressed its gratitude for the 'infinite pains he has taken in connection with all the working plans and intricate details of the whole work'.⁵¹ Sinclair was presented with a silver model of the Cathedral but the writer noted that this was an inadequate recognition of his contribution.

Experiments in Eclecticism: Sinclair's Zanzibar Buildings

As in Mombasa, Sinclair began to design buildings soon after his arrival in Zanzibar in 1898 (see [Figure I.5](#) for their locations within Zanzibar town). The residence for the Regent, the interior of which was discussed in [Chapter 1](#), was the first commission he undertook for Rogers, the First Minister and at that time Regent ([Figure 2.4](#)). This building was completed in 1903 and renamed the British Residency in 1914, after the establishment of the post of British Resident.⁵² Sinclair used forms familiar from Mombasa Cathedral. Polylobed arches feature prominently and rounded crenellations crown the building. He also broadened his range of influences and motifs, by including an octagonal turret, a classical balustrade, a cupola, balconies and verandas. Versions of these latter two elements had been introduced to Zanzibar by the Indian community who built many palaces in Zanzibar Town in the nineteenth century. So suitable were they to the climate that verandas were used to most striking effect on Sultan Barghash's palace of the 1880s, the Beit al-Ajaib, the House of Wonders.⁵³ The cupola on the seaward aspect of the Regent's residence is another form with Indian origins. To complete the plethora of architectural forms, beneath the cupola is a classical colonnade.

Sinclair took particular pride in Sir Alfred Milner's appreciation of this building during the latter's visit from South Africa in the 1900s. This experienced colonial officer 'quite won my heart by his admiration of the building which I had recently completed for the Regent which, he said, put to shame the villa which he had had to occupy as his Government House at Pretoria'.⁵⁴ Milner, who later became Secretary of State for the Colonies, had previously worked in Cairo for four years and had a wide experience of Near Eastern colonial cities, rendering his praise all the more meaningful for the young architect. The Regent's residence provided the model some 20 years later for the new British Residency building in Dar es Salaam, which Sinclair designed in the early 1920s for Tanganyika Territory. Sinclair made one of his rare architectural assessments of this later building. He described it as 'a rather imposing building ... of Saracenic design with a tower reminiscent of a Scottish castle'.⁵⁵ This description, blending Saracenic, Indian, classical and Scottish baronial elements, could readily apply to the version created in Zanzibar 20 years earlier.

Figure 2.4 Regent's residence, subsequently Agency and Residency, ZNA: AV 21/1.

This building was the centre of official Government social and ceremonial activity. As Rogers's photographic collection and *Gazette* reports indicate, it was regularly used for many kinds of entertainments. Dr Aders recalled in the early 1930s how 'the Residency lends itself to a show: I can see all the Arabs and the Indians sitting together'.⁵⁶ On the large lawn in front, the British garden party was transplanted 'to the East' where members of all the elite communities took refreshments and played croquet (Figure 2.5). In attendance were Arabs in characteristic turbans and long robes, European women in Edwardian fashions – the layers of fabric stifling in the humidity, Indian male attendees in knee-length sherwani coats and caps, and European men in uniform or typical colonial garb. The image was one of harmonious interaction between the communities, reflected in architectural elements of the building behind. This palatial building therefore framed the administration and reinforced the composite form of government, described in Chapter 1, underpinned by the sense of stability provided by supposed British pre-eminence.

Figure 2.5 Reception at the Regent's residence, c. 1905. RCSL: Rogers Collection, BR/0115/Y30468/D1.

After his promotion to the rank of Consul in 1906, Sinclair was 'kept busy, in my spare time, designing the Law Courts, Post Office and various other buildings, such as houses for District Officers, native hospitals and a Leper asylum'.⁵⁷ He was an important figure in the land reclamation project that created the Mnazi Mmoja recreation ground, the sporting venue where Sinclair played an active part as a key member of the cricket team.⁵⁸ The High Court represented the first use of a substantial dome in his designs for Zanzibar, a form with no known precedents on the island (Figure 2.6). In this case, Sinclair placed the dome over a hexagonal drum in contrast to the octagonal drum supporting the dome of Mombasa Cathedral. Once again he combined crenellations and polylobed arches. In contrast, the contemporaneous Post Office used the classical style, with Ionic columns supporting a balustrade and a rounded arch. A further example of a building from the 1900s, the National Bank of India, combined crenellations, two turrets (including arrowslits), a classical parapet with finials and ogee arches.⁵⁹ Therefore, as Metcalf identifies in the case of Indo-Saracenic architecture in the late nineteenth century, there was no linear progression towards a fully hybrid style; Sinclair continued to experiment.⁶⁰

Figure 2.6 Zanzibar High Court and Law Courts, c. 1904. TNA: CO 1069/169/1.

On two notable occasions, Sinclair accepted commissions for

individuals beyond the scope of Government works, the most important of whom was the Sultan, Khalifa bin Harub, with whom Sinclair was well-acquainted as Chief Secretary. During the early 1910s, the Sultan called upon Sinclair to ‘give some assistance in improving his Country Palace at Kibweni’, known as Beit el-Kassrusaada [Palace of Happiness].⁶¹ Here Sinclair placed a crenellated square tower alongside balconies and verandas on all sides, with an arcade of horseshoe arches. This marks his first application of this form of arch in Zanzibar, which he had not used since designing Mombasa Cathedral. Horseshoe arches featured in German colonial buildings in late nineteenth-century coastal German East Africa and were a simple means to ‘Orientalise’ a building.⁶² Cleo Cantone has observed a comparable introduction of the pointed arch form by French architects in Senegal: ‘Based on the presumption that the pointed arch was “Muslim”, colonial builders applied it indiscriminately in contexts where such an aesthetic had neither past nor relevance’.⁶³ Unlike the pointed arch, which could be interpreted as a reference to both European Gothic and Islamic architecture, the horseshoe arch was a distinctively Moorish motif with strong associations with Islamic Spain and North Africa. It is possible that Sinclair was inspired by his first visit to Tangier in 1910 where he would have seen many examples of horseshoe arches, both in their original Moorish context and integrated into European designs.⁶⁴ The irregular form of Kibweni Palace and lack of symmetry are reminiscent of Shaw’s late nineteenth-century designs.⁶⁵ Sinclair’s second private commission was for a rich Indian merchant for whom he designed the Bharmal Building in the early 1920s, an unconventional building even for Sinclair, featuring both rounded and pointed arches, surmounted by a balustrade and two pediments.

Sinclair’s designs gained wider circulation through the publication of an article in the *Architectural Review* in 1912. The author, Lena Milman, introduced in [Chapter 1](#), was a published architectural historian and wife of Edward Clarke, British Agent and Consul General from 1909 to 1913.⁶⁶ In this article, entitled ‘A Country House in Zanzibar’, Milman discussed Sinclair’s design for his own house where he had adapted a powder magazine into a country house ([Figure 2.7](#)). It features none of Sinclair’s explicitly ‘Eastern’ influences. She described it as ‘An interesting example of the adaption of the English tradition to the present needs in the tropics’.⁶⁷ She used the illustrations of the house to show that ‘he possesses good judgement combined with much ability as a designer’.⁶⁸ Through such contacts Sinclair was able to develop his architectural skills as well as disseminate his designs to a wider audience. She found the house both ‘pleasing to the eye and hygienically closely adapted to the needs of

white men in hot countries'.⁶⁹ One can speculate on why this building was chosen to feature in a British publication rather than Sinclair's more idiosyncratic and original designs. It may have been because the majority of Zanzibar's British residents lived in former Arab or Indian palaces in Stone Town. Sinclair's house was an innovative conversion project, the result of which bears comparison with Edwardian house design in the metropole. It might reflect Milman's personal taste and what she believed would be of interest in architectural circles in Britain, where Victorian Orientalist styles looked increasingly dated.⁷⁰

Figure 2.7 Front view of Sinclair's house in Zanzibar, converted in the 1910s. Lena Milman, 'A Country House in Zanzibar', *The Architectural Review* 31 (January 1912): 30.

Seeking Sinclair's Sources of Influence

Various sources for Sinclair's architectural style have been alluded to thus far and these deserve closer examination as they critically informed his design for the Peace Memorial Museum. With so few comments in his memoirs, definite statements cannot be made. However, these points of reference highlight the range of influences to which Sinclair was exposed as an administrator-architect. As he revealed in the earlier quotation, one of his principal motivations in Mombasa was to create a building 'sufficiently Arabesque' for 'an old Arab town'. It has been suggested that Sinclair would have been familiar with Arabian and Islamic styles even before leaving London through exhibitions, museums and material culture. Owen Jones's designs in the *Grammar of Ornament* were often used by architects and artists to represent 'the Orient' without geographical discrimination.⁷¹

Sinclair's personal knowledge of Islamic architecture beyond the East African coast was still limited. On his various leaves of absence, he stopped only briefly in the Near East on his way to East Africa, and he visited North Africa for the first time in 1910.⁷² His colleagues in Zanzibar may have passed on information from their varied experiences in postings around the Empire. His memoirs describe meeting fellow colonial officers, some of whom he admired for their particular knowledge of the Near East. For example, Alfred Hardinge, who had served at Constantinople and Cairo, and Sir Charles Eliot, the Turkish and Arabic scholar, were influential in his working and social life and may have been sources of information for his designs.⁷³

We must also consider how British architectural specialists perceived the buildings they encountered in Zanzibar in the 1910s and 1920s. Sinclair recorded his opinions on Zanzibar's architecture only fleetingly, such as his description of the Beit al-Ajaib, Sultan

Barghash's House of Wonders, as 'more wonderful than beautiful'.⁷⁴ Lena Milman in her article referred to the preponderance of corrugated iron in Zanzibar's cityscape. A more scholarly opinion was put forth by the official Government Architect in the 1920s, P. C. Harris, a member of the Public Works Department and the first qualified British architect in Zanzibar. As we shall see, he was responsible for the completion of the Museum building after Sinclair's departure, and he also researched local architecture more comprehensively. His findings were published in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* in April 1925, a few months before the Museum was opened. This article mainly summarises the existing interpretation of external Arabian influence upon Zanzibar's architecture and history drawn from the earlier accounts of Pearce and Lyne.⁷⁵ He specifically laments the dearth of older buildings brought about by the lack of durable building materials.⁷⁶ Most pertinent for this discussion is his critique of local examples of eclecticism. He severely criticised Omani palaces from the nineteenth century as being 'a medley of Arab forms and base western importations'.⁷⁷ Harris's own designs for Government buildings were plain and unostentatious with subtle references to Arab architectural forms – it is possible that he also found Sinclair's hybrid schemes inelegant. As will be seen, he became frustrated in finding a technical solution to realise the Museum design, particularly the dome.

Harris concluded by warning of a doomed future for Arab culture in Zanzibar:

The Zanzibar Arabs are a dying race and with the effacement of the former barbarities of the slave trade has come the gradual disappearance of their art, which is now being supplanted by the worst products of Europe as interpreted by the now considerable Indian population, who have almost lost all art of their own.⁷⁸

The ongoing concerns of the British over the future of the Arab population have already been discussed in [Chapter 1](#). Here, Harris reveals that in the cultural sphere the British felt justified in creating a role for themselves as the preservers of the finest elements of both Arab and Indian architectural traditions.

Commissioning the Peace Memorial

We have seen in [Chapter 1](#) that there had long been a desire to establish a museum in Zanzibar. The decision to create a memorial to those who had lost their lives in the Great War finally provided the opportunity. At a public meeting 'representative of all communities' on Tuesday 24 June 1919, Sinclair, then Acting Resident and

Chairman of the Peace Memorial Committee, proposed that the memorial take the 'form of a Public Hall comprising also a Museum for which a large number of most interesting exhibits collected by Dr Aders were already available, and that it should be erected in the Victoria Gardens and be open to the free use of all communities'.⁷⁹ This same location had been suggested by Clarke in the 1900s. Dr Lascari suggested a maternity hospital as an alternative proposal, which he felt would have a greater benefit for the people. This suggestion was rejected after community representatives decided that too many 'prejudices' existed for this to be wholly supported.⁸⁰ A museum was evidently deemed a neutral space, unlikely to offend any community sensitivities. Dr Spurrier suggested that the museum should focus upon education, and its programme should include lectures to be given in the Hall. Sinclair's rough estimate of cost was one lakh rupees (Rs. 100,000) to be raised through public subscription under the control of a committee, which included Arab and Indian community representatives. The following week, the first meeting of the Memorial Hall Committee was held. On this occasion, it was confirmed that the memorial would take the form of a public hall containing a museum and gymnasium, to hold 1200 people.⁸¹

Both these aspects of museum formation – the housing of several civic amenities in one building and funding through public subscription – were familiar in provincial Britain in the nineteenth century.⁸² In the British context, this practice of calling for subscriptions was justified on the grounds that the institution would both benefit and belong to the people, a middle-class paternalism which was reflected in the attitude of the British administrators in Zanzibar.⁸³ Such calls for subscriptions were not unusual in the Protectorate. During the war, the population had become familiar with pleas for donations to the Red Cross Society. They raised £19,500 in public subscriptions during the war in spite of Zanzibar's only brief involvement in the hostilities.

After the first Committee meeting on 30 June 1919, subscriptions began to arrive. Encouragement was given by a Rs. 5000 donation by the Sultan, Rs. 500 from Sinclair, and Rs. 5000 each from Cowasji Dinshaw Bros, the largest Indian trading company, and Smith Mackenzie Company, the Crown Agents. The list of principal subscribers inscribed on a plaque erected in the Museum entrance indicates that the majority of these benefactors were from the Arab and Indian communities (Figure 2.8). This is one of many pieces of evidence suggesting that involvement in the Museum represented an opportunity to participate in a cultured elite activity. Several hundred members of other communities – including the Swahili population – contributed sums of one or two rupees.⁸⁴ The idea of the gymnasium

faded away, in spite of its forming part of the proposal when calling for donations. Eventually, Rs. 57,886 was collected from public subscriptions. Although the Committee was satisfied initially with this sum, it would prove wholly inadequate for the ambitious building project. In the 1930s, this public 'ownership' was questioned and quietly overlooked when it became expedient for the Government to take full responsibility for the Museum.

By 3 November 1919, the selected site had changed from the Victoria Gardens to its current site on the north-west corner of the Mnazi Mmoja recreation ground, due to 'certain objections'.⁸⁵ The distance is only a few hundred yards, although it had some implications. Its location may reflect the underlying project of social improvement, through its placement adjacent to the site of recreation.⁸⁶ The new site was marginally closer to Ng'ambo, 'the other side' where the majority of the so-called 'African' town inhabitants lived, for whom the building was in theory specifically intended.⁸⁷

Figure 2.8 Marble plaque listing principal subscribers to the Peace Memorial.

Constructing the Peace Memorial: Collapse and Sinclair's Departure

There was no question over the architect for the building. Through this significant public commission, Sinclair could fulfil many of his visual ambitions for the city. The earliest reference to the likely design of the building can be found in the report of the Memorial Hall Committee meeting in July 1919:

The building will be surmounted by a large dome over 90 feet in height which will be visible from far out at sea, and it is hoped that the building, besides fulfilling most useful purposes, will form a fitting memento of Peace and be a worthy memorial to those who have lost their lives in the war.⁸⁸

With a commission from the committee he chaired, Sinclair could create a monumental building for Zanzibar. It provided an opportunity to realise the long-standing desire to transform the cityscape by incorporating domes and minarets. Sinclair cannot have been unaware of the significance of this commission, as expressed in the *Gazette* in March 1920:

... from an inspection of the plans it is safe to predict that when completed the building will be the most imposing in the Island and will be the greatest of the many debts which the Protectorate owes to Mr J. H. Sinclair, C.M.G., C.B.E., in his capacity as architect.⁸⁹

Expectations ran high. The foundations of the building were laid in

August 1920 based on Sinclair's ground plan.

The building progressed satisfactorily until mid-1922. During this time Sinclair was finally appointed as the British Resident, a post he had been disappointed not to be awarded in 1914.⁹⁰ This was a popular appointment with the Arab and Indian communities, and members of Swahili community held *ngoma* dances on Mnazi Mmoja to celebrate.⁹¹ The *Gazette* expected that Sinclair's monumental building would open on the forthcoming Armistice Day. However, on 28 June 1922, the north wall collapsed along with one of the hexagonal sides, killing one workman and injuring four others.⁹²

Details of the accident were reported in a letter of 22 February 1923 from Sinclair to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, via the High Commissioner for Zanzibar in Nairobi. Sinclair blamed bad workmanship on the part of the building contractor and assured the Secretary of State that a European foreman would be appointed. Clearly the incompetence of a non-European building contractor was more readily seen as the source of the Museum's dramatic collapse than any shortcomings in the design. Sinclair reported that at one stage they feared they would have to demolish and entirely reconstruct the building.⁹³ He engaged the opinion of Henry Lanchester, in Zanzibar at that time making recommendations for future urban planning.⁹⁴ Lanchester was an experienced architect who had designed several buildings in India and who was at this time creating a palace for the Maharajah of Jodhpur.⁹⁵ It is notable that Sinclair included in this letter to the Secretary of State a detailed description by Dr Spurrier of the educational value of the Museum. The language of this passage strategically echoed the trusteeship principles of empire then current in the Colonial Office.⁹⁶ Sinclair sought to reiterate the inherent value of the project in order to request additional funds. Fortunately, he had a supporter in Sir Robert Coryndon, then High Commissioner for Zanzibar and Governor of Kenya Colony, who was himself a keen collector and to whom the museum in Nairobi would later be dedicated. Coryndon was a vital mediator. The building had already exceeded its budget: the financial implications of the collapse were the primary concern of the Secretary of State.

Amidst this financial manoeuvring and architectural revision, Sinclair wrote to Coryndon submitting his resignation as British Resident on 22 March 1923, having been in post for only 18 months. He wrote in his memoirs that this decision was due to his own ill health, and later correspondence between Spurrier and Sinclair suggests Sinclair's wife may have suffered from depression.⁹⁷ Professional pressures may also have played a part in this decision. Sinclair was at this stage overseeing a number of difficult projects. As

Dean Sinclair has revealed, he was criticised by the Colonial Office for printing excessive copies of Lanchester's report without their approval.⁹⁸ One can only speculate on how far the collapse and uncertain future of his masterpiece was a contributing factor in his decision to resign.

Sinclair continued to be involved in the design process during the six months leading up to his final departure, although Harris, the Government Architect, increasingly took charge of the construction. Sinclair was still being pressed to account for the collapse in August 1923 by the Secretary of State.⁹⁹ Rather than blaming poor supervision as in his earlier letter, the materials were now considered to be the source of the problem. A new composition of lime mortar had recently been tested by the Public Works Department. Only with the Peace Memorial accident was it realised that the new mixture did not possess sufficient drying qualities. A new Foreman of Works was installed in August 1923 and Sinclair sent him the revised designs drawn up by Harris. Of these revisions, the most significant decision was to 'demolish the upper portion of the building and to re-construct it so as to form a single storey building surmounted by a dome'.¹⁰⁰ The impact of this alteration will be discussed in the next section. In these designs, the qualified architect Harris included various measures to strengthen the building.

Sinclair left the island in September 1923. The Zanzibar Chamber of Commerce wrote appreciatively of his permanent contribution to the island: 'we feel that we can say to you with conviction that you are leaving here memorials more enduring than bronze which will benefit us in our time and will continue to benefit those to whom we must one day yield our places'.¹⁰¹ Spurrier noted particularly in his parting speech the importance of Sinclair's longevity of service: 'the last link with the old order of things' and his experience of working with the great early administrators, such as Mathews, Hardinge and Eliot, iconic figures who continued to be held up as ideal models of colonial officers. His departure closed 'with a snap this book of the past'.¹⁰² Another link to the 'good old F.O. days' was severed. Spurrier also mentioned in this oration that it would soon be seen how Sinclair 'won through unparalleled difficulties in the highly ornamental building which it is hoped will eventually form the Peace Memorial Research Laboratories and Educational Museum, and become then a great utility building'.¹⁰³ There is a detectable undercurrent of uncertainty in this public proclamation.

In May 1924, Harris expressed the hope that the building would be completed by September of that year, although major questions remained over the project's budget. Harris's estimates were scrutinised carefully. The new Resident, Sir Claud Hollis, wanted a full

explanation as to why he needed to ask the Secretary of State for additional funds.¹⁰⁴ From the protracted correspondence, it is evident that enthusiasm had waned. It was agreed that the building could not be left in its current state. As Crinson has observed, elsewhere in the informal empire incomplete projects threatened to compromise the validity of the British imperial mission in the eyes of the local audience.¹⁰⁵ Many difficulties had been encountered due to the expense of local labour and in particular the 'difficulty in constructing the dome'.¹⁰⁶ It was eventually constructed from a steel frame and ribs, the first occasion on which such a technique was used on a large scale.¹⁰⁷

Spurrier, whose role as curator had been suspended, was re-engaged in September 1924 and a committee was established to organise the Museum's contents. Aspirations that it might open in November 1924 proved unrealistic. The building was eventually ready in early 1925, though the preparation of the displays took many months. The reports cited difficulties of creating display cases 'proportionate to the size and style of the building'.¹⁰⁸ Finally, more than six years after the project was approved, the building opened on Armistice Day, 11 November 1925. It had cost the Government Rs. 80,000 more than Sinclair had estimated at the outset.

As this discussion has shown, the building project was designed and spearheaded by British inhabitants of Zanzibar. Fragments of evidence, however, indicate how a wider range of Zanzibar's inhabitants was involved during the building process. European officers were invariably preferred by the Government to supervise and oversee major projects. This was made abundantly clear after the delay caused by the collapse, when Bandali Allarakhia Contractor, an Indian builder, wrote to Sinclair offering his services: 'It grieves my heart to see that such an important memorial should be thus left unattended owing to the lack of a skilful supervisor. I shall be willing to accept anything as my wages to supervise this erection which Your Excellency may deem fit. I am even willing to offer my free services to this noble work'.¹⁰⁹ Sinclair instructed his Private Secretary to reply thanking Contractor for his offer and to explain that he was unable to accept 'in view of the fact that Government has only agreed to the completion of this work in condition that European supervision is employed'.¹¹⁰ In the early stages of the Museum's construction, Sinclair personally supervised the building process with 'no European Clerk of Works being available at the time'. It should be recalled that at this time he was also the Acting British Resident and thus unable to devote himself fully to the supervision required of the complex project. He was assisted by 'a Goan draughtsman belonging to the P.W. [Public Works] Dept who gave to it such time as he could spare

from his ordinary duties'.¹¹¹ The Public Works Department, like many Government Departments, was largely staffed by Indian or Arab clerks while the building contractors were mostly Indian firms. Clearly, although the cause of collapse was eventually agreed to be the materials, the capacity of non-Europeans to supervise continued to be doubted. When constructing the Museum extension in the early 1930s one administrator declared that without a European in charge 'more harm than good is done'.¹¹² It should be recalled, however, that local firms constructed buildings successfully throughout this period without European intervention.

The references to the labourers who physically constructed the building are rare, but its collapse brings them momentarily into view. A 'Memon workman' was killed in the accident and 'a Somali labourer' seriously injured – indicating that workmen from many communities were employed as builders and labourers.¹¹³ At a later stage in the building's construction, when describing the difficulties of completing the dome, Harris referred to the use of prison labourers. His tone indicated that this was not ideal, but an inevitable economy with the spiralling cost of the project.¹¹⁴ As in the majority of colonial settings, while management and design of the construction was strictly limited to Europeans, the physical labour was undertaken by the subject communities, often unskilled in building processes.¹¹⁵ Their participation was essential to create the monuments of the colonial city. This was a rare example where a grand and ornate building was created into which the labourers and their families might subsequently be welcomed as museum visitors.

Redesigning the Museum: Reconciling the Practical with the Monumental

The collapse during construction and subsequent redesign radically altered the eventual form of the building. Analysing the impact of these changes is made possible through two extant, but incomplete, sets of designs in the Zanzibar Archives. The first set dates from September 1920 and the second from October 1923 when the design had been adjusted after the collapse. These sources are supplemented by the only written description of the meaning of the building's design. This article by Richard Crofton, Member and later Chairman of the Museum Committee, appeared in the *Gazette* at the time of the opening. Crofton later adapted the piece for inclusion in his *Zanzibar Affairs, 1914–1933*, published in 1953. It is unclear how far Crofton's analysis was based upon discussion with Sinclair early in the 1920s or if he drew his own conclusions. His account has become the definitive

source for describing the style of the building. It is illuminating to discuss the plans with reference to Crofton's description.

Figure 2.9 September 1920 ground floor plan. Detail of ZNA: AW 13/108a.

The earliest dated document showing the ground plan of the Museum is the version of September 1920, although the foundations had been laid earlier in the year (Figure 2.9).¹¹⁶ Since the decision would be made after the collapse not to demolish and start afresh, this plan fixed and limited the scale and layout of the final building. Stylistically, its hexagonal shape is unusual for a domed building. Although Sinclair had already used a hexagonal drum for the dome of the Law Courts, this did not influence the plan of that building. Crofton commented upon the novelty of this choice:

The hexagon has always been beloved by the designer of arabesques for the facility with which it forms a pattern but has been rarely used as a building plan. Hexagons, pentagons and triangles were used as plan shapes for early Renaissance mansions in England in an age which delighted in magic and astrology.¹¹⁷

Figure 2.10 September 1920 elevation design. Detail of ZNA: AW 13/108a.

As Crofton indicated, a hexagon was an atypical form for a domed building and significantly he suggested both 'arabesque' and English influences, although from a less rational or scientific period in English history. Other than the domed cathedral at Mombasa, with its octagonal drum, Sinclair had only built smaller domes before. The design for the Ta Braxia chapel in Malta, which he may have known when working for Pearson in the 1890s, has a relatively small dome and the majority of the internal space is covered by a sloping roof, but the strong vertical emphasis towards the dome is notable. A large dome of this scale was ambitious and unprecedented in Zanzibar.

On the 1920 ground plan it is also possible to see that a semi-circular stage area with dressing rooms in the turrets at either side was proposed, presumably to serve the multiple purposes anticipated for the building. This does not appear on later designs and there is no raised area in the final building. As seen from the early Memorial Committee meetings, the building was originally intended to be a public hall, and presumably the ground floor would have been relatively free of large exhibits to accommodate this proposed stage.

The elevation design of 1920 for the proposed façade of the building is a remarkable piece of evidence, which demands a reconsideration of the interpretation of the final building as constructed (Figure 2.10). A dome would have surmounted this façade, as indicated by a design on a separate sheet. The differences are immediately striking, although it is important to recognise the

retention of several decorative and structural elements. The only recorded interpretation of this first design is a tantalising reference in the *Gazette*: ‘An appreciation of the design, which is Saracenic, can probably best be left until a later date’ before the writer went on to declare, as quoted earlier, that it would doubtless be the most imposing building on the island.¹¹⁸ No further reference to this first design was made in the *Gazette*. ‘Imposing’ and ‘Saracenic’ therefore are the only descriptions we have from 1920, the latter term as we have seen a flexible description of ‘Eastern’ elements and applied by Sinclair himself to his buildings. Even a cursory analysis of the design confirms that it certainly would have been a commanding and grandiose structure.

The most immediately obvious changes were the drastic reduction in height of the overall building by slicing out a whole storey, the removal of the crenellated wall and the altered central window treatment. Originally, the building was intended to have two stories, a fact that is particularly significant when one remembers that it was to have the multiple functions of museum, a public lecture hall and, Spurrier hoped, a research institute. Had the first floor remained, it is likely that significantly more space would have been available for exhibits although without a surviving first floor plan it is unclear how much. All the Museum’s curators would complain about the insufficient space, and the collections were eventually expanded into a temporary annexe in 1927 and a permanent extension commenced in 1930. It remains a common problem of museums worldwide as their architects rarely anticipate the growth of collections and the required workforce.

Returning to the elevation design, the striking central window immediately attracts the eye. This is characteristic ‘Sinclairian Saracenicism’ and eclecticism.¹¹⁹ Sinclair took the horseshoe arch, the form he introduced to Zanzibar, and surrounded it with striped masonry. This is a standard Ottoman decorative device, used originally by the Mamluks in Egypt, and common in Victorian London.¹²⁰ Córdoba Cathedral, formerly the Great Mosque built by the Umayyad Caliphate, is the best-known example of the horseshoe arch surrounded by striped masonry. Once again, a Moorish reference was considered the most apposite. Into the centre Sinclair inserted a stained glass decorative window, a kind of rose window, typical of European Gothic architecture. Rose windows had already been used in Zanzibar at the west end of Christ Church Cathedral and they featured in several places in Mombasa Cathedral. Pearson also employed them regularly, for example the imposing rose window on Truro Cathedral and on a small scale on the Ta Braxia chapel. A comparison of these four facades reveals significant echoes of the arrangement of the

registers in Truro Cathedral in Sinclair's designs for Mombasa and the Peace Memorial. In each case, the rose window sits centrally over a series of tall narrow arched windows, above a row of wider pointed arches at ground level. Sinclair made the tracery of the rose window geometric and added the prominent striped arch. The similarity in these configurations suggests that Sinclair may have been continuing to draw on his experience of the principles of neo-Gothic façade design even 30 years after his training.

Comparing this façade arrangement with the final design, one also notices the removal of the crenellated wall at the upper level. At Mombasa Cathedral, the dome's drum was surmounted by crenellations, whereas in the 1920 design for the Museum the crenellated wall was to lie below the hexagonal drum of the dome. Removing this feature in the final building took away one of Sinclair's most commonly used forms and one which had the most direct reference to pre-colonial architecture in Zanzibar. This feature, too, would have created a strong vertical emphasis in the original building – creating in effect a domed palace. It may have borne some resemblance to the Anarkali tomb in Lahore, with its high octagonal sides surmounted by a dome. This building had been converted to the Governor's House in Lahore, a redevelopment that may have led to it being discussed in architectural circles.¹²¹

Alongside these major changes, there are important elements of continuity in this design with the final construction. The rose window remained, although the removal of the first floor lowered it to the roof level. The decorative windows are therefore only visible externally when viewed from a distance. They have more impact internally where coloured shafts of light create patterns on the plain white walls. The design of the tracery in the rose windows alternates between two patterns. One is the geometric rose window, while the other is an Ottoman-style 'honeycomb' pattern, a design used also in the windows of the House of Wonders. On Pearson's Ta Braxia chapel the smaller rose windows also alternate between four designs around the building. Internally the terracotta-coloured stonework in the arches surrounding the rose windows is the only remaining element of the original striped stonework pattern planned for the external façade. The turrets retained their ornamental pattern. The basic form of the back entrance veranda was preserved, consisting of three pointed arches, although ornamental patterned stone grilles were added to the balustrade.

The impact of losing the second storey had the overall effect of making a significantly lower building. It should be recalled that Sinclair publicly stated it would be a dome rising over 90 feet and visible from the sea. The elevation on the original design does not

include the dome, although a separate design for the dome was included in the 1920 drawings. This second drawing shows the height at which the dome was intended to rise in relation to the crenellated wall. Imagining this building with a dome alters its character considerably. With the higher turrets and the dome, the building would have had a far taller profile, reminiscent of the upper section of the Ta Braxia chapel. [Figure 2.11](#) is a new drawing based on the architectural plans to suggest how the original design might have appeared with the dome. Although an approximation, it provides an indication of how Sinclair conceived the building. The removal of the first storey and these other simplifications had the effect of radically altering the visual impact of the building. The horizontality of the domed building as constructed is more reminiscent of mosque architecture than Sinclair originally intended.

Figure 2.11 Reconstruction of 1920 design, using 1920 façade and dome from 1923 design. Drawing by Livia Wang.

Interpreting the Building

The most frequently cited architectural reference point for the Peace Memorial Hall is Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, originally a Byzantine Church, converted to a mosque after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. It is clear from examining [Figures 2.12](#) and [2.13](#) that there are certain similarities in these domed forms, although the much lower dome of Hagia Sophia and its vast size give it a quite different silhouette and scale from that of the Peace Memorial Museum. It is important at this stage to recall the original design, [Figure 2.10](#), from which the final design emerged, which differs considerably from Hagia Sophia. The reference to the church/mosque in Istanbul was first made by Crofton in his *Gazette* article for the opening of the Museum. He endeavoured to make a more complex point than describing simple architectural mimicry. This passage is worth quoting in full as the associations have endured.

The general design of the Bet-el-Amani is derived from the type of mosque and secular building which originated in Constantinople and spread to Egypt and other countries after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. These were modified forms of existing Byzantine structures, the best known of which is the mosque which was once the church of Hagia Sophia, for the Ottoman conquerors, being of a nomad race, had no building traditions of their own.

The governing principle of these buildings was the roofing of a large central space by a dome for the structural support of which the remainder was disposed. The resulting composition has come to be regarded as 'Eastern' though historically not quite correctly. The same structural arrangement, modified, produced St Mark's, Venice, and the Taj Mahal. ...

This building was not designed as the foregoing might make it appear to be an essay in historical architecture, but to provide a worthy memorial of the war, and at the same time to instruct the people of Zanzibar not to desert what is good in their own traditional art for what is bad or mediocre from Europe. The spirit which evolved the buildings which were the model for the Bet-el-Amani was the same which displayed itself in the charming old buildings of Zanzibar, so fast disappearing, once gone it cannot be regained.¹²²

This 'spirit' of architectural endeavour and achievement was, in Crofton's view, fading – echoing the judgement of Harris in his discussion of Zanzibar's architecture, in which the British were responsible for the 'preservation' of the best of local architecture. Crofton therefore hoped that not only the contents but the building itself could be an educative tool for the population; he called for them not to abandon their 'traditional' forms. The nature of Zanzibar's traditional arts was of course determined by British interpretation. The 'spirit' to which he alluded seems to be an adherence to traditional forms and a reverence for historical models. This is somewhat contradictory given that the Museum building was an unprecedented form in Zanzibar involving an eclectic British design for a modern institution. It is also notable that Crofton did not think of the Taj Mahal as 'Eastern' – again we encounter the complications and multiple meanings of the term.

There are several other important points to note earlier in the passage. A pamphlet of 1990 paraphrased Crofton's first sentence to state that the design 'is derived from the type of mosque which originated in Constantinople'.¹²³ Crofton in fact made reference both to the Christian and the Islamic associations of domed buildings, in particular emphasising the Byzantine origins of this form subsequently employed across the Near East by architects of the Ottoman Empire. We have seen that Bishop Steere, when building Christ Church Cathedral in the 1870s, explicitly made references to Byzantine styles, and that Sinclair may have been influenced by the fashion in early 1890s London for Byzantine architecture and its cultural synthesis. Sinclair himself considered the design 'Saracenic' and therefore sought a reference to Islamic architecture, though the complex origins of the dome design meant it simultaneously had Christian and Byzantine references. The lower building is more readily comparable to a mosque than the original design, which I have suggested makes reference to cathedral designs. It should not, however, be assumed that the lack of a single source, either Byzantine church or Islamic mosque, was a weakness in the design. We have seen how wedded Sinclair was to eclecticism. This very intermingling of influences and hazy points of reference was deliberate and can be seen as a form of architectural diplomacy which fused east and west.

Reception and Legacy of Sinclairian Saracenism

One recurring question in the analysis of colonial architecture is how it was received by the local inhabitants. Evidence of this is notoriously hard to find. Unlike Mombasa Cathedral, this building was designed for the use of the whole population. After living in Zanzibar for over 20 years, Sinclair had a greater familiarity with its culture, although it is debatable how far this informed his design. As mentioned in the opening of the chapter, there is one source which indicates the interpretation by the local population, who built, paid for and were to use the building: ‘Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair’. Kirkham tantalisingly suggested that it was ‘for other reasons objectionable’ without elaborating further on these comments. It is possible that the British did not want to appear to be interfering in, aping or simulating Islam too closely. It may also have ‘peevd Spurrier immensely’ as by this stage he, as Curator, felt that the Museum was his dominion and did not want its function misunderstood. Although Hollis agreed with Kirkham’s suggestion of a new name in kiSwahili, his written reply reveals another illuminating piece of evidence regarding the local perception of the building. He had heard it called: “Nyumba ya Mzimu” – the house of the ghost or “N[yumba] y[a] Mizimu”.¹²⁴ An interesting comparison can be made to the museum in Kampala which was known as ‘Enyumba ya Mayembe’ [house of fetishes] by the locals who believed the objects gave spiritual powers to the colonial government.¹²⁵ In the case of Zanzibar, the moniker may have evolved due to the lengthy duration of the Museum’s construction, the deaths of the workers and the as-yet obscure purpose of the building.

It is also interesting to consider how local people came to liken the domed structure to a mosque. The phrase ‘Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair’ is not one known in contemporary Zanzibar.¹²⁶ In reality, local Ibathi mosques could hardly be more different. The austerity of Zanzibar’s mosques had long been noted by the European population. One can speculate on various sources for this appellation. The thirteenth-century Great Mosque at Kilwa on the mainland featured multiple small domes. [Figure 2.14](#), one of two carved doors in Stone Town that depict domed structures, depicts a mosque-like building containing a religious inscription flanked by lamps.¹²⁷ The two doors in Zanzibar town featuring this design predate the Museum. Their decorative pattern and rounded lintels are typical of the style of doors influenced by Indian designs in the nineteenth century. Many of Zanzibar’s

Indian community originally came from Gujarat where mosques featured domes, as elsewhere in India. The building contractors were Indian as were some of the workmen, so it is possible that the name evolved from them and filtered into wider usage. Finally, descriptions of domed mosques elsewhere may have reached them through merchants from across the Western Indian Ocean who spent half the year in Zanzibar. One should recall that Zanzibar had long been a connected and cosmopolitan space – that domes were not included in Zanzibar’s mosques was a liturgical tradition and should not lead us to believe that they were ignorant of architecture from elsewhere in the region.

Figure 2.14 Decorative lintel on Stone Town door incorporating a mosque design within a semi-circular lintel.

While the phrase ‘Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair’ fell out of use, the reverential and spiritual essence of the building continued to be a point of reference. Both Spurrier and Ailsa Nicol Smith on occasion referred to the rooftop towers as ‘minarets’. Evelyn Waugh visited in the late 1920s with a Turkish companion who ‘could not for some time be persuaded that the Museum was not the tomb of some notable, and was accustomed to make appropriate devotions as he passed’ until Waugh showed him the bottled snakes and ephemera inside.¹²⁸ In the eulogy at Spurrier’s funeral, the author wrote of the atmosphere in the building created by Spurrier, describing it as ‘a gracious temple of learning whose light is free to all’:

And the Museum was an appropriate frame for him; he had long inspired veneration, and an attitude of respectful attention was inescapable in his society but, in addition, he diffused within the Bet-el-Amani so compelling an atmosphere of reverence that, if the remark is not frivolous, one sometimes had the feeling that shoes ought to have been left at the entrance. In it he was the revered custodian of a shrine.¹²⁹

The author implied that Spurrier was in effect the ‘imam’ of this ‘temple of learning’, while the reference to removing one’s shoes completed the Eastern allusion. Cecil Thompson, curator from 1958 to 1962, gave evidence of the continued misinterpretation of the design when he found a photograph of the Museum in a book published by an international publisher with the caption ‘Arab Monument in Zanzibar’.¹³⁰

Although Sinclair’s style was generally popular with the Sultan, the British administration and others, there were also critics. Waugh described the Residency and the Museum as ‘the work of an amateur, rather over-impressed by the glamour of his surroundings’. He was more impressed by the recent buildings designed by Harris, ‘the present official architect’, which ‘seemed to me very good indeed,

combining great economy and restraint with a delicate receptiveness to local influence'.¹³¹

Sinclair was invited to return to Zanzibar in the 1940s to advise on designs for the new hospital by then Chief Secretary, Eric Dutton. Sinclair recalled being asked to help 'in maintaining the Saracenic style common to the existing Zanzibar buildings'.¹³² The façade in the earlier hospital designs by a Nairobi architect was 'not in harmony with the local style' according to Sinclair. He worked on the designs for this and the Sultan's new town hall in Ng'ambo, ensuring these structures were built using his approved arches and decoration. Sinclair therefore continued to define the 'local style'. F. D. Ommanney, British administrator in the 1940s and 1950s, wryly described the British contribution to architecture in Zanzibar, both Sinclair's style and his influence upon Dutton (referred to here as the Chief Secretary):

This was considered to be the appropriate manner for an Arab city. It involved the construction of maddeningly Moorish arches, of lattice-work balustrades and pointed architraves, of turrets, domes and cupolas reminiscent of old Baghdad. For these the Chief Secretary had an eye like a hawk and no plans were allowed to pass without them. Drastic internal deformities were often inflicted upon buildings in order to achieve more and larger and wider Moorish arches, more elaborate lattice-works, more fluted columns, domes and minarets. Thus the new Maternity Hospital, under the watchful eye of the Public Works Department, assumed the aspect of a Caliph's palace. A cinema near the docks seemed to have affinities with the Alhambra, while the new airport building seemed to have exchanged nods with the Great Mosque at Cairo.¹³³

This tongue-in-cheek conclusion underlines the essentialism of the East, a thread running through this chapter. By the 1950s, eclecticism in architecture, suggested here by the 'maddeningly Moorish' arches, was out of fashion, as the hybrid designs were being considered problematic.¹³⁴ Such criticism was made at a time when cities in West and East Africa were being constructed using minimalist contemporary styles, reflecting a modern imperial vision.¹³⁵ The British in Zanzibar branded their new official buildings with stylised arches reminiscent of various tropes of 'traditional' design.¹³⁶

In practical terms, the Museum building created a burden on the Public Works Department and required almost continuous upkeep. Thompson, curator in the late 1950s, described the 'elementary trap' of the architect in making the building circular as it was an inefficient space for storage and display.¹³⁷ The first recorded instance of water leaking through the roof came only four years after it opened.¹³⁸ The flat-roofed entrance filled with water during the monsoon period and was slow to drain. In order to maintain its white, gleaming appearance, it needed to be whitewashed regularly. Anxiety over the strength of the structure persisted. In 1954, Porteous, then acting

curator, requested an alternative space for the heavier items due to the 'weakness of the structure of the Museum' and the risk presenting by storing them in the turret rooms.¹³⁹

Finally, it provided insufficient space for the Museum collections. The nearby old Indian gaol was used as a temporary extension in the late 1920s before a second call for subscriptions yielded the funds to build a permanent extension. This building by Harris has a simple rectangular plan, suitable for projecting lantern-slides and films (Figure 2.15). The small ornamental details recall nineteenth-century buildings in Stone Town, which, as described in the Public Works Department report, 'conforms as far as possible to local architectural tradition'.¹⁴⁰

Figure 2.15 Zanzibar Museum Annexe, built 1930.

John Sinclair's development of Saracenism in Zanzibar is a compelling example in the study of British colonial architecture. His 'sufficiently Arabesque' designs were intended to impress his commissioners, i.e. the British, Indian and Arab elites. His buildings profoundly influenced Zanzibar's cityscape and his aesthetic vision has had an enduring legacy. While London's architectural scene discouraged him, he was able to become the dominating architectural voice in a small colonial territory.

Political meanings can be read into the eclectic designs. His arrival in Zanzibar followed closely the establishment of Zanzibar as a British Protectorate. His buildings diverted attention from the flawed and chaotic project of colonial governance. Its form does not represent, as Metcalf observes in India, a 'mastery' or a comprehensive knowledge the territory's history and culture by the colonial power – as we have seen Sinclair made no claim to have systematically studied local architecture and the diversity of influences do not support this reading.¹⁴¹ There was no attempt to analyse the contradictions of complexities of the religious and racial setting in Zanzibar – motifs were drawn readily from various sources. The building that Zanzibar's inhabitants dubbed the 'Muskiti ya Bwana Sinclair' was far from being an exemplary and carefully sculpted model of Orientalism. Yet this very eclectic mix suited the cosmopolitan audience in Zanzibar. Furthermore, the collapse had the effect of creating a more unified design than might have otherwise been constructed. The complex history of domed buildings – the church of Hagia Sophia subsequently inspiring mosque design throughout the Islamic world – has influenced interpretations of the Museum's form since its opening,

blurring the points of reference between Byzantium and Islam.

As a war memorial with annual ceremonies on Armistice Day, the building provided physical manifestation to the imagined community of the British Empire. As a museum, its curators and their assistants used its contents both to represent Zanzibar's past and to drive forward the modern mission to educate the population. Subsequent chapters will reveal the complex and problematic story within this imperfect colonial monument.

- 1 ZNA: AB 41/1, Chief Secretary to Resident, 7 November 1925.
- 2 Also spelled 'Beit' and 'Beyt'.
- 3 Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: The Development of Colonial Natural History Museums During the Late Nineteenth Century* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988). See also Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (London: Athlone, 1999).
- 4 This comment first appeared at the time of the opening: *Gazette*, 14 November 1925, 385. It is likely to be by Crofton, as the text appeared verbatim in Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*. See also Zanzibar National Museum Library, 'A Guide to the Peace Memorial Museum', September 1990.
- 5 Mark Crinson, *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 230.
- 6 Dean Sinclair, "Memorials More Enduring Than Bronze": J. H. Sinclair and the Making of Zanzibar Stone Town', *African Geographical Review* 28 (December 2009): 71–97.
- 7 Trained architects, such as Herbert Baker, designed buildings across various territories in the British Empire. In sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of professional architects worked in South Africa, but Baker, for example, also created designs for buildings in Kenya, India, Australia and Britain. For major commissions, celebrated architects might be invited to submit designs, the most famous example being Baker and Edwin Lutyens's designs for New Delhi. See Michael Keath, *Herbert Baker: Architecture and Idealism 1892–1913: The South African Years* (Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing, 1992); Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Jane Ridley, 'Edwin Lutyens, New Delhi, and the Architecture of Imperialism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 2 (1998): 67–83.
- 8 Colonial officers often held multiple positions, for example on committees, in addition to their official post: A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 107.
- 9 Crinson, *Empire Building*, 7–9.
- 10 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), 108.
- 11 G. A. Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, c. 1840–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 434.
- 12 P. J. Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral and the CMS Compound', *History in Africa* 35 (2008): 209–29.
- 13 Anthony Quiney, *John Loughborough Pearson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 3.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 167, 171.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 216. My thanks to Alex Bremner for drawing my attention to this building.
- 16 Crinson, *Empire Building*, 72–3.
- 17 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 10.
- 18 Shaw's London buildings included several residential blocks in Chelsea, New Scotland Yard and a house for William Lowther, diplomat and MP, which became the Royal Geographical Society. See Andrew Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw*, revised edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Lynne Walker, 'The Royal Geographical Society's House: An Architectural History', *The Geographical Journal* 146, no. 2 (July 1980): 178–89.
- 19 Saint discusses the particular skill Shaw had in designing eclectic styles successfully, and the ease with which it can fail: Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw*, 5.
- 20 G. Alex Bremner, "Some Imperial Institute": Architecture, Symbolism, and the Ideal of Empire in Late Victorian Britain, 1887–93', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (March 2003): 67.
- 21 Quoted in Bremner, "Some Imperial Institute", 67.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 23 There is a significant literature on Indo-Saracenic architecture of which key works remain: Thomas R. Metcalf, 'Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860–1910', *Representations*, no. 6 (April 1984): 37–65; Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*; Crinson, *Empire Building*.
- 24 Felix Driver and David Gilbert, 'Heart of empire? Landscape, Space and Performance in

Imperial London', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16:1 (1998): 11–28; John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*; G. Alex Bremner, 'Nation and Empire in the Government Architecture of Mid-Victorian London: The Foreign and India Office Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 3 (2005): 69; Bremner, 'Some Imperial Institute'; Anthony Burton, *Vision and Accident: The Story of the V & A* (London: V&A Publications, 1999); Michael Port, *Imperial London: Civil Government Building in London 1850–1915* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995).

25 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 14–16.

26 Felix Driver and David Gilbert, 'Imperial Cities: Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories', in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, ed. Felix Driver and David Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 6.

27 Quiney describes Pearson's offices as 'dull rather than sparkling', a place of 'ceaseless efficiency' illuminated by the warmth of Pearson's character and the respect his pupils held for him: Quiney, *John Loughborough Pearson*, 177.

28 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 12.

29 Ibid., 59, 126, 158.

30 Ibid., 51.

31 P. J. Frankl's study of the Cathedral in the context of the Church Missionary Society acknowledges the need for further examination of Sinclair's architectural work: Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 216, fn. 31.

32 *African Standard*, 3 June 1905, 4 as quoted in Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 219. The newspaper changed name to the *East African Standard* later in 1905 after changing hands. Sinclair may even have met his predecessors as designers in London: Ewan Christian was married to Pearson's daughter. The firm had undertaken several church restorations in the nineteenth century in Britain.

33 Ibid.

34 Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 216–17.

35 Ibid.

36 Bremner has uncovered material that highlights Steere's role in creating the preliminary design: G. Alex Bremner, 'The Architecture of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa: Developing a Vernacular Tradition in the Anglican Mission Field, 1861–1909', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 4 (December 2009): 522.

37 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 51.

38 Carol A. H. Flores, *Owen Jones: Design, Ornament, Architecture, and Theory in an Age in Transition* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2006), 238.

39 ZNA: CA 1/8, Aders to Spurrier, 21 April 1930, citing letter received from Sinclair.

40 *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 56, August 1905, 611 as quoted in Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 218.

41 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 105.

42 Bremner, 'The Architecture of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa', 522–3.

43 Bremner suggests that Steere may have seen Zanzibar as a kind of 'African Venice': Ibid., 523.

44 Sheriff, *Zanzibar Stone Town*, 23; Mohamed El Amrousi, 'Imperial Sanctuaries: Arab Urban Enclaves on the East African Coast', in *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories*, ed. Fassil Demissie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 74–77.

45 Bremner, 'The Architecture of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa', 522.

46 O'Rorke quoted in Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 221.

47 Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (January 1989): 137; Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991); Bremner, *Imperial Gothic*, 1–20.

48 Frankl suggests that it was probably regarded by the local population as a foreign import, like the religion practised within. Unfortunately he does not provide supporting evidence for this conclusion: Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 225.

49 *Gazette*, 7 June 1905, 2.

50 Quoted in Frankl, 'Mombasa Cathedral', 225.

- 51 *Gazette*, 7 June 1905, 2.
- 52 It is currently the State House for the President of Zanzibar and access is highly restricted.
- 53 Garth Myers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 2; Sheriff, *Zanzibar Stone Town*, 35.
- 54 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 88.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 56 ZNA: CA 1/9, Aders to Spurrier, s.d., c. 1932.
- 57 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 92.
- 58 Sinclair considered the land reclamation project and the creation of hospitals and roads as some of his most significant achievements as a colonial administrator as they were facilities 'to improve the lot of the inhabitants': RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 126. Sinclair played cricket almost weekly, as recorded in the *Gazette*.
- 59 D. Sinclair, "Memorials More Enduring Than Bronze", 88.
- 60 Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, 61.
- 61 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 95. Sinclair used a pure classical style for the McMillan Library in Nairobi in the mid-1920s, typical of the city's architecture at that time, including the Coryndon Memorial Museum.
- 62 Examples of horseshoe arches are visible in the remains of the Customs buildings in Bagamoyo and can be seen on photographs of the original German government buildings in Dar es Salaam.
- 63 Cleo Cantone, 'The Point of Pointed Architecture: Its Revival in Europe and its Appearance in "Colonial" Mosques', in *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories*, ed. Fassil Demissie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 85.
- 64 In St Andrew's Church, an Anglican church in Tangier completed in the 1900s, the horseshoe arch is used to striking effect between the nave and the altar. My thanks to Alex Bremner for this observation.
- 65 Walker, 'The Royal Geographical Society's House', 181.
- 66 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 94.
- 67 Lena Milman, 'A Country House in Zanzibar', *The Architectural Review* 31 (January 1912): 29.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 The photographs and plans published in the influential volumes by Hermann Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus* (Berlin: E. Masruth, 1904–5), established Arts and Crafts architecture as an internationally recognised modern style.
- 71 Crinson, *Empire Building*, 65; John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 72.
- 72 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 141.
- 73 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 71, 86.
- 74 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 65.
- 75 Harris told W. H. Ingrams that architectural styles from the Chaldeans and Assyrians was passed down over thousands of years in Arabia and the forms from these ancient peoples were visible in Zanzibar: Ingrams, 'History' in William Hendry, 'Preface', in *Zanzibar: An Account of Its People, Industries and History*, ed. Local Committee of the British Empire Exhibition (Zanzibar: Zanzibar Government Press, 1924), 38.
- 76 P. C. Harris, 'The Arab Architecture of Zanzibar', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 32, no. 385 (April 1925): 341.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 343.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 345.
- 79 *Gazette*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1431, 30 June 1919, 165.
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Gazette*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1432, 7 July 1919, 173. Museums in Britain were also established as war memorials: Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 155–6.
- 82 Samuel Alberti notes how various learned societies, libraries and associations would come together under the single institution of the museum: Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, 'Placing

Nature: Natural History Collections and their Owners in Nineteenth-Century Provincial England', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 35, no. 3 (2002): 300.

83 Amy Woodson-Boulton, 'Victorian Museums and Victorian Society', *History Compass* 6, no. 1 (January 2008): 119; Hill, *Culture and Class in English Public Museums*, 6; 60; 143.

84 In the early 1930s the legal basis of the Museum's foundation was brought into question and the list of subscribers meticulously rewritten: ZNA: AB 41/2, Public Subscription list to the Peace Memorial Museum Hall.

85 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1449, 3 November 1919, 336.

86 Christopher Whitehead describes the anticipated 'moral benefits' perceived in the mid-to late-Victorian period of placing a museum within an area of parkland, thus providing sites of physical and moral improvement: Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 62–64.

87 The extensive literature on the spatial construction of Ng'ambo includes Garth Myers, 'The Early History of the Other Side of Zanzibar Town', in *The History and Conservation of Zanzibar Stone Town*, ed. Abdul Sheriff (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press), 30–45; Sheriff, 'The Spatial Dichotomy of Swahili Towns', 63–81; William C. Bissell, 'Conservation and the Colonial Past: Urban Planning, Space, and Power in Zanzibar', in *Africa's Urban Past*, ed. David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2000), 246–61.

88 *Gazette*, 7 July 1919, 173–4.

89 *Gazette*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1469, 22 March 1920, 95.

90 RCLS: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 97.

91 *Gazette*, Vol. XXX, No. 1555, 14 November 1921, 637.

92 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1588, 3 July 1922, 381.

93 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to High Commissioner for submission to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 February 1923.

94 For further analysis of the impact of Lanchester's town plan, see the most recent work by Bissell and Dean Sinclair: Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*, 180–82; 198–213; 230–37; Sinclair, "'Memorials More Enduring Than Bronze'", 90–93.

95 H. V. Lanchester and T. A. Lodge, 'The Maharajah's Palace, Jodhpur', *The Builder*, 13 January 1950, 49–55; Philip Davies, *Splendours of the Raj: British Architecture in India, 1660 to 1947* (London: John Murray, 1985). Lanchester had worked with Patrick Geddes, an architect interested in museums. His 1923 plan for Zanzibar included a 'national museum' in the Old Fort. See Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos and Power in Colonial Zanzibar*, pp. 235–6.

96 ZNA: AB 41/1, Spurrier, Memorandum on the Peace Memorial Research and Education Museum, 31 January 1923.

97 ZNA: CA 1/8, Sinclair to Spurrier, 6 November 1930.

98 D. Sinclair, "'Memorials More Enduring Than Bronze'", 93.

99 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to High Commissioner for submission to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 August 1923.

100 ZNA: AB 41/1, Résumé submitted to Resident from Chief Secretary, 5 July 1924.

101 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1653, 1 October 1923, 621.

102 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1652, 24 September 1923, 603.

103 *Ibid.*, 604.

104 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to Chief Secretary, 28 June 1924.

105 Crinson, *Empire Building*, 8.

106 ZNA: AB 41/1, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 July 1924.

107 My thanks to Dr James Campbell for discussing the plans and the dome construction.

108 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1754, 5 September 1925, 322.

109 ZNA: AB 41/1, Bandali Allarakhia Contractor to Resident, 9 February 1923.

110 ZNA: AB 41/1, Private Secretary to Bandali Allarakhia Contractor, 13 February 1923.

111 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to Secretary of State, 11 August 1923.

112 ZNA: AB 41/1, Mr Last to Chief Secretary, 26 January 1932.

113 *Gazette*, 3 July 1922, 381. Immigrant labourers from the mainland were essential in the Public Works Department. See Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution and Its Aftermath*, 11.

114 ZNA: AB 41/1, Report on Expenditure, 1 July 1924.

- 115 Crinson, *Empire Building*, 228.
- 116 *Gazette*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1489, 9 August 1920, 347.
- 117 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1764, 14 November 1925, 385.
- 118 *Gazette*, 22 March 1920, 95.
- 119 Abdul Sheriff coined this term for Sinclair's style: Sheriff, *Zanzibar Stone Town*, 85.
- 120 Herbert Butterfield, George Gilbert Scott and Alfred Waterhouse were architects famous for their use of red and white striped masonry, a style also used by Norman Shaw: Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw*, 260–63.
- 121 See Sylvia Shorto, 'A Tomb of One's Own: The Governor's House, Lahore', in *Colonial Modernities: Building, Dwelling and Architecture in British India and Ceylon*, ed. Peter Scriver and Vikramaditya Prakash (London: Routledge, 2007), 151–68. My thanks to Sylvia Shorto for drawing my attention to this building.
- 122 *Gazette*, 14 November 1925, 385.
- 123 Zanzibar National Museum Library, 'A Guide to the Peace Memorial Museum', September 1990.
- 124 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to Chief Secretary, 9 November 1925.
- 125 Anne Gaugue, 'Musées et colonisation en Afrique tropicale', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 39, no. 155 (1999): 730.
- 126 I am grateful to Prof. Sheriff for the opportunity to discuss this with students at the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute in February 2009.
- 127 Mwalim, *Doors of Zanzibar*, 18–19; 118.
- 128 Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People* (London: Duckworth, 1931), 169.
- 129 ZNA: CA 1/3, In Memoriam booklet for Alfred Henry Spurrier, 1935, 5.
- 130 Cecil H. Thompson, 'Tropical Island Museum', *Corona* 13, no. 9 (September 1961): 342.
- 131 Waugh, *Remote People*, 169.
- 132 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 123.
- 133 F. D. Ommanney, *Isle of Cloves: A View of Zanzibar* (London: Travel Book Club, 1957), 86.
- 134 Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10.
- 135 Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, 'Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa: The Work of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, 1946–56', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, no. 2 (June 2006): 188–215; Fassil Demissie, ed., *Postcolonial African Cities: Imperial Legacies and Postcolonial Predicaments* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- 136 Richard Harris and Garth Myers discuss Dutton's creation of 'hybrid housing' for the residents of Ng'ambo which fused modern materials with traditional home structures: Richard Harris and Garth Myers, 'Hybrid Housing: Improvement and Control in Late Colonial Zanzibar', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 66, no. 4 (December 2007): 476–93.
- 137 Thompson, 'Tropical Island Museum', 342.
- 138 ZNA: CA 1/7, Spurrier to Museum Committee Chairman, 25 October 1929.
- 139 ZNA: AB 41/6, Acting Curator to Director of Public Works, 5 May 1954.
- 140 ZNA: BA 18/21, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1930, 169.
- 141 Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, 24.

‘The Same Breed of Museum Worker’: Curators, Collaborators and the Museum Community, 1925–1942

The life of a museum depends ultimately upon the curator.¹

Ailsa Nicol Smith, 1942

With this statement, Nicol Smith recalls W. H. Flower’s pronouncement of 1898: ‘As I have said on a previous occasion, “What a museum really depends upon for its success and usefulness is not its building, not its cases, not even its specimens, but its curator”’.² Museums have even been described as part of the ‘extended self’ of the curator.³ Nicol Smith’s assertion was written following her resignation from the Zanzibar Museum, a place where she had consistently felt undervalued and misunderstood; her work disrupted by ‘non-experts getting the wrong emphasis’.⁴ Nicol Smith’s attempt to persuade the Government of the necessity of a qualified curator draws attention to an important theme of this chapter, the standing of the curatorial profession in the interwar period.⁵ That she felt compelled to reassert the need for the post suggests there were significant doubts about the use of Government resources for the Museum and its curator, in spite of highly supportive remarks on the Museum’s work by Christopher Cox, the influential Education Adviser to the Secretary State of the Colonies.⁶ At the heart of this chapter is an exposition of the challenge faced by curators in communicating the social contribution of museums to the political bodies that controlled them.

A museum community consists of more than its employees and visitors – the ‘relational museum’ involves a wide variety of actors beyond the limits of the building.⁷ Collectors, hunters, colonial administrators, volunteers, committees and sponsors all participated in the life of the Zanzibar Museum. This chapter will investigate four central figures. The qualifications and experiences of the two curators, Alfred Spurrier (in post 1925–1935) and Ailsa Nicol Smith (in post 1936–1942) demonstrate the wider shift during the interwar period towards professionalization within the Colonial Service. In tandem with each curator, I will examine the contributions of their most significant unpaid associate. In Spurrier’s time, William Harold Ingrams, represents an important example of the colonial

administrator-anthropologist whose participation was critical in the establishment and legacy of the Museum in the early period.⁸ Muhammed Abdulrahman was an Arab school teacher who worked with Nicol Smith in the late 1930s and early 1940s and was one of the first two Museum Committee members drawn from outside the British community.⁹ As well as researching the anthropology of the island, Abdulrahman was a notable member of the young scholarly Arab elite.¹⁰ I will then discuss the integral, and as yet unappreciated, role of the local staff. By analysing these varied participants, I seek to demonstrate the dependence of the Museum upon local supporters, informants and staff. Their involvement demands that we rethink the colonial museum as simply a British institution, and understand it as part of a complex web of social relations and representations.¹¹

Investigating Ailsa Nicol Smith's curatorship raises the question of gender in the colonial world. That she was a woman was a critical qualification for the role. The search for a new curator in 1935 coincided with a drive in Zanzibar to improve women's education, for the 'betterment of conditions of life in the Protectorate'.¹² Her experience highlights the struggle for women to gain professional acceptance in the male-dominated colonial administration. After the Second World War women would participate in varied roles across the Colonial Office, but in the 1930s their work was still concentrated in the traditionally 'feminine' professions of education and nursing.¹³ The loosely defined curatorship role, which required curatorial experience and a willingness to teach, presented a rare opportunity for a woman at this time. Yet we shall see how she struggled to convince her colleagues in Government of the importance of the Museum's work and felt constantly undermined by them. Her tenure of the curatorship brings into focus the discordance between professionalism, culture and colonialism in Zanzibar in the interwar years.

Intersecting Professional Spheres: Museums, the Colonial Office and Africa

The nature of curatorship in the Zanzibar Museum and the professional status of the curator must be examined in the context both of museum professionalism in Britain and of the Colonial Office. Taking the museum sector first, by 1920, there were around 400 museums and galleries in towns and cities across Britain, the majority of which had been founded since 1850.¹⁴ A significant constituency of curators with a shared set of skills and values had thus emerged, though they varied widely, from university academics and retired

enthusiasts to local council administrators.¹⁵ In the absence of qualifications or recognised training, they often struggled to receive the recognition, salaries or status they believed they merited.

Professions that provided a specialised service, of which the museum profession is a good example, relied upon education and certification to define the market value of their expertise.¹⁶ While a salary is naturally a fundamental component of a profession, the question of remuneration was a thorny issue for museum workers.¹⁷ They struggled with the common notion that their work was seen as an interesting and pleasurable activity. Gladstone reportedly stated that he would not support increasing curators' salaries as he could imagine 'no more delightful an existence'.¹⁸ This comment was made some decades earlier but the perception of dilettantism persisted. The willingness and interest of people of independent means to work in museums further complicated this situation.

The foundation of the Museums Association [MA hereafter] in 1889 marked the increasing recognition of museum work as requiring specific skills. As a professional society, one of its purposes was to establish, on behalf of its members, that this particular service was useful to society.¹⁹ During its early years, however, meetings tended to be 'clubby' occasions, where members discussed the minutiae of curating techniques rather than how to act as an effective professional association.²⁰ It was not until the first two decades of the twentieth century that the MA seriously began to address how to establish standards in practice, training and salaries.

Two important reports after the First World War highlighted the challenges facing museums, including pitiful salaries, an uneven spread of expertise and a desperate need for training. The British Association for the Advancement of Science Committee's report in 1920 recommended that a minimum salary be set for curators and that they should be educated to university level with training in museum techniques.²¹ Sir Henry Miers, who would visit the Zanzibar Museum in 1930, reiterated the need for improved status and salaries in his 1928 report on the state of museums in Britain, sponsored by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (CUKT). These reports exposed stark realities. In some cases the caretaker was paid more than the curator.²² Miers observed that many museums were staffed by retired 'septuagenarian and octogenarian curators, lacking either specific training or interest in the professional status of their work'.²³

Some progressive initiatives occurred in the 1920s, such as a training summer school at the National Museum of Wales, but it was during the 1930s that the MA and the universities inaugurated certified training programmes. Sir Henry Miers, by this time president of the MA, led this drive.²⁴ Yet expertise remained variable across the

country. Staff in national and university museums became increasingly specialised, with training provided by experienced colleagues. In the many smaller museums, curators still held multiple roles. They remained poorly paid and untrained; their institutions could not afford to send them on training courses. The MA report of 1938, sponsored by the CUKT to assess the progress since Miers's survey a decade earlier, highlighted the slow pace of change. It is worth noting that major developments, such as the creation of the diploma, only occurred thanks to external funding.

Questions over curatorial professionalism were further complicated when transposed to the colonial setting. Careers in the Colonial Office were, like those in museums, becoming increasingly specialised during the 1920s and 1930s. There are two related aspects of 'expertise' which will be highlighted here: firstly the skill of administration and how far the colonial service was itself professionalised; and secondly the knowledge officers gained about local people and culture, rendering them 'experts' for local colonial institutions such as museums.

By the end of the First World War, the Colonial Office was responsible for the majority of British possessions in East Africa.²⁵ The administration of these territories where indigenous populations formed the overwhelming majority, as opposed to settler colonies, transformed the nature of the Colonial Office and the work of its officers in Africa.²⁶ The new approach to the colonial mission in Africa after the war, articulated in the concept of 'trusteeship', led to an expansion of the administration and greater specialisation.²⁷

The quality of candidates for the Colonial Service and their professional achievements noticeably increased in the 1920s. Before the First World War, the demand for officers had been 'moderate', in terms of both numbers and necessary qualifications, as recalled by Sir Ralph Furse, Director of Recruitment in the Colonial Office from 1930 to 1948.²⁸ The tough conditions suited those less attracted by more academic Government posts.²⁹ Furse was in charge of appointments to Africa from 1919. He personally interviewed almost every candidate and looked more leniently on academic qualifications for service in tropical Africa than was expected for applicants to the Sudan Political Service or the Indian Civil Service.³⁰ He continued to believe that strength of character, perceived as necessary to control 'traditional' African authorities, was a more important quality in an administrator than intellect.

Training for Colonial Office service in Africa was first introduced in 1909, with a term's study at the Imperial Institute in London.³¹ It was not until 1926 that more extensive training based at Oxford and Cambridge began: the so-called Tropical African Service Courses

included lectures on anthropology, colonial history and language.³² Special courses were introduced for those entering the educational and medical services. By the 1920s the professional classes in Britain looked upon service in the Colonial Office as a respected and attractive career.³³ It is clear from the writings of colonial officers in Africa that, for all the good intentions of the formal preparation courses, the most valuable lessons came from colleagues with direct experience on the ground. Those departing recalled the importance of the long ship voyages to colonial territories, which afforded the opportunity to listen to 'old coasters' and 'old hands'.³⁴

Of the 102 British Government officers in Zanzibar in 1921, the majority undertook general administration.³⁵ Approximately 10 were District Officers, living outside the town and overseeing the government of a particular region. Two fields, those of medicine and law, required officers to have specific qualifications. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fighting tropical disease was a particular concern. Not only was disease seen as one of the principal obstacles to be overcome by Europeans but one effect of colonialism was the spread of epidemic disease amongst African communities.³⁶ In this context, doctors were particularly significant figures in British territories and from Livingstone onwards they gained heroic status, lauded for their scientific expertise.³⁷ Other professional disciplines such as architecture, as we have seen, were regularly practised by those lacking certification.

The leisure time that colonial officers enjoyed provided rich opportunities for amateur anthropologists, linguists and historians.³⁸ Many published the results of their research and lectured to learned societies in London. Their wives, too, often became experts and gave talks.³⁹ The concurrent development of anthropology as an academic discipline altered the context in which such works were undertaken and received, as the discussion of Ingrams's career will demonstrate. Societies were often established to provide a forum for these amateur colonial scholars. The East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society, founded in 1909, was one of the first such societies in East Africa. As was often the case in India, the collections of this society led to the creation of a museum in Nairobi.⁴⁰ Interestingly, in Zanzibar, the situation was reversed. Individuals such as Sir John Kirk had been keen naturalists and scholars as early as the 1870s, but no formal academic society was founded, the Book Club founded in 1904 being the closest equivalent.⁴¹ It was the Museum that would bring these amateur scholars together.

The tenures of Spurrier and then Nicol Smith reflect these changes in the colonial administration and the museum profession in Britain: an elderly retired enthusiast with excellent local knowledge, followed

by a young specialist museum worker. But this was not a simple progression. While Spurrier was a typical amateur scholar, his status as a doctor gave academic credibility to his work as a curator and he was keen to keep up-to-date with progressive public health developments worldwide.⁴² Due to his particular experience and interest, as well as the perceived needs of the Protectorate, the first displays and education programme of the Zanzibar Museum related directly to public health and scientific matters. Spurrier moulded the Museum to fit with his specialist knowledge. After his tenure, now that a doctor no longer held the position of curator, doubts were raised by the Government over the validity and value of the curatorship. Nicol Smith, as a museum specialist but academic generalist, constantly had to persuade the Government to recognise curatorship as a professional skill. Meanwhile, the growth of Colonial Office specialism in fields in which the Museum had been established, such as public health, undermined Nicol Smith's claim to professional status.

Curating the New Museum: Dr Alfred Henry Spurrier

In 1922, John Sinclair, architect of the Museum and then British Resident, petitioned the Colonial Office to fund Dr Alfred Spurrier's salary as a curator. He stated that: 'Zanzibar is fortunate in securing the services of an officer who combines with scientific attainments a deep knowledge of local history and a personal interest in the native'.⁴³ As the position was not formally advertised, this is the most specific description we have of the perceived qualities needed in a curator at the time; it draws attention to the three tenets of Spurrier's experience necessary for the new Museum's curator. I will use these qualities – proven scientific and medical successes in Zanzibar, an understanding of the island's culture and a commitment to 'native' education – to investigate Spurrier's qualification for the role and how it informed his ambitions for the Museum. As the Museum's first curator, remaining in post for 10 years, his vision and particular interests had a far-reaching effect upon the Museum's policies, collection and organisation.

Spurrier was the most experienced British medical officer and trained scientist in Zanzibar by the 1920s. After obtaining his medical qualification in London in 1887, he acted as Health Officer in Zanzibar from 1895 to 1912. During this period, he was one of a small group of scientifically trained members of the colonial administration. In addition to treating individual patients, he took responsibility for

improving public health, particularly to control deadly diseases such as plague and malaria. He was an early proponent of the theory that the mosquito spread malaria, and he introduced various public hygiene measures including house-to-house inspections and the strategy of paying local people to catch rats.⁴⁴ Although this was considered suspiciously by the urban population at first, it was soon realised that exchanging rats for rupees was a useful source of income.⁴⁵ Spurrier's success in the treatment of tropical disease made him the regional expert in disease prevention and sanitation. In 1902 he was called upon by the High Commissioner of British East Africa to assist with a plague epidemic on the Uganda Railway.⁴⁶ His services were again sought during the First World War when he travelled to Tanganyika to treat South African troops suffering from malaria.⁴⁷ Sinclair credited him personally with transforming Zanzibar from 'a dangerous fever spot to what may now be described almost as a health resort'.⁴⁸ Spurrier received the Third Order of Brilliant Star from the Sultan for his efforts.

Spurrier's long-term collaborator and closest friend was Dr William Mansfield Aders, the Economic Biologist for the Protectorate. Tropical medicine, public health and entomology were closely related areas of science, and together the two men studied these fields in Zanzibar. They shared an interest in expanding their scientific knowledge of the spread of disease but also in relaying this knowledge to Zanzibar's inhabitants, first made possible in the 1910s by Aders's small museum. From the time of the earliest recorded discussions concerning the Peace Memorial Museum project in 1919, specimens from Aders's museum were to be rehoused in the new institution, bestowing upon it a scientific and pedagogic purpose.

Spurrier was a man of both science and culture. His 'deep knowledge of local history', the second quality highlighted by Sinclair, was clear to all those who knew him. He was able to recall:

the splendours of the past, and a kaleidoscope of stately Arab chiefs, paladins of the Sultan's court, great British ministers, great Indian merchants, foreign agents with ends to gain, picturesque adventurers from many lands, shock-headed freebooters from Guardafui and the Red Sea, all those 'old unhappy far-off things' passed as on a screen.⁴⁹

While we do not know the extent or accuracy of his knowledge, this quotation captures the essence of his importance to the Museum. He represented a direct link to these 'splendours of the past', and could personally recollect key events of Zanzibar's recent history. These experiences and memories were arguably as important to the Museum's collection as the objects, and they formed an integral part of his qualification for the role. By the time he died, there were no remaining European officers who had been with him in 'the good old

F.O. days' of the 1890s and 1900s.⁵⁰ His 'old-world air' and passion for literature, history and the arts gave him the appearance of the quintessential curator. He was the closest the British community in Zanzibar had to an academic.⁵¹

Like many of the early administrators featured in [Chapter 1](#), Spurrier's avid interest in local culture led him to collect objects personally. [Figure 3.1](#), an apparently posed photograph, shows how he wished to present himself: a scholar surrounded by objects of varied ethnic origins.⁵² There are several pieces of intricately carved, darkwood Bombay Presidency furniture, popular amongst all Zanzibar's elites. On the right hand side, a *kiti cha enzi*, the Swahili chair of power, is visible. Most conspicuous is the Arts and Crafts-style screen depicting three women picking flowers in a pastoral idyll. Such eclectic artistic trends were popular during Spurrier's formative years in Britain. The whole image is that of a cultured colonial bachelor.

Figure 3.1 Spurrier in his home in Zanzibar surrounded by his personal collection (s.d.). ZNA: AV 4/26.

Medical doctors were well placed to become cultural 'experts' as they gained unique access to local practices.⁵³ Spurrier was no different, and though he did not publish scholarly articles on Zanzibar's culture, the Museum and the *Gazette* provided an outlet for his findings. He was appointed as one of the first editors of the newspaper in 1895, and continued to fill this role intermittently until the 1930s, helping out between the departure and arrival of other officers. He wrote short articles interpreting local traditions for the mainly European readership. Alongside his work for the Museum, print culture was another means by which he exhibited his knowledge of the Protectorate.

Sinclair's letter finally highlights Spurrier's 'personal interest in the native'. His direct encounters and experiences in local homes as a doctor and health officer stimulated this concern. He was known to be the European whom the islands' inhabitants found most approachable, thanks to his fluent kiSwahili, understanding of local culture and sympathetic ear. At the Museum, 'a mixed clientele brought their difficulties to someone who was no stranger to them and on whom they felt they could always rely for sympathy and help'.⁵⁴ His unthreatening manner contrasted with some of his more forthright compatriots and his lengthy service made him familiar with generations of families from all communities. His personal correspondence tells of Zanzibaris regularly approaching him to seek employment in the homes and departments of his colleagues and friends.⁵⁵ The responses from his fellow Europeans indicate that Spurrier regularly passed on such requests, perhaps even too often.

His ability to straddle racial divides marked him out amongst administrators of the period. This evidently made him a vital conduit of information for the Government. One British officer explained: 'That is the advantage of Spurrier, he keeps us in touch with people'.⁵⁶ To balance this description, it is important to note that despite his natural sympathies and interactions with Zanzibar's many communities, he was a member of an establishment that did not question the imperial hierarchy. He stubbornly tried to enforce unpopular practices, such as registration of 'native' births, as necessary for the people's 'own' good.⁵⁷

Sinclair gave evidence of Spurrier's long-standing interest in 'native welfare and improvement' by using the example of the establishment 'at his own expense [of] an industrial institute for natives where evening classes for carpentry, weaving etc. are held' in the late 1910s.⁵⁸ This focus upon education and instruction was central to the Museum's purpose and informed its collection. In the 1910s, he and Aders lectured local medical staff on the science of public health and he temporarily held the post of Director of Education during that decade. By the time of his appointment as curator, Spurrier was already corresponding with other museum curators 'with a view to ensuring that it [the Museum] is founded on lines best calculated to afford instruction to the natives'.⁵⁹ Unfortunately we know no more about the content of this correspondence, though there are indications – such as a reference to the organisation of the British Museum with its 'keepers' of departments – of his knowledge of metropolitan practices. Evidence survives of other members of the Zanzibar Museum community corresponding with London's museums: Crofton personally took a set of photographs to T. A. Joyce at the British Museum for his advice on case design, apologising for the 'amateurish' state of the Museum.⁶⁰

Spurrier lacked specific curating skills, and he relied upon museum periodicals for second-hand information. However, he used contacts with various communities to expand the collection and encourage donations. He ensured that the Museum featured regularly in the *Gazette*. As we have seen, at this time in Britain there were many curators in charge of provincial museums who lacked his depth of knowledge or dedication.⁶¹

Spurrier's work can be interpreted as a personal mission. He was a devout Catholic; prior to studying medicine, he had considered training to be a priest. The 'In Memoriam' booklet from his funeral described him as a 'medical missionary' and as 'priest' of the Museum.⁶² He approached his work as a health officer and museum curator with missionary zeal.⁶³ A friend in 1930 presciently observed that Spurrier must 'obtain a divorce from that Museum ... Otherwise I

feel you will never get back to this your native country again'.⁶⁴

One quality unstated by Sinclair but essential for the curator in the colonial setting was skill in diplomacy combined with an understanding of official and social codes. A new institution needed advocates and supporters. Spurrier was described in 1902 as 'the best and most popular man on the East Coast'.⁶⁵ Several visitors, including Evelyn Waugh, a notorious social critic, greatly enjoyed his company.⁶⁶ He was characterised by his appearance and enthusiasm; Sinclair described him as 'a little bearded gnome, full of energy and ability'.⁶⁷ His quaint foibles were treated with fondness rather than derision.⁶⁸ This geniality was a necessity of life in a small, closed island community. His years of service in various Government departments had provided him with crucial practical experience of dealing with bureaucracy, in contrast to his young successor, Ailsa Nicol Smith.

As he grew older, some criticism crept in. Hollis in 1925 wished Spurrier to give up his editorship of the *Gazette*, as he 'lives in a different world from the rest of us, and the Supplement is becoming more like a Parish magazine than ever'.⁶⁹ While the elderly curator brought unique knowledge and personal experience, his traditional mode of expression did not fit with the image of a modern Protectorate the Resident wished to project. On the other hand, his approach to education was progressive and, even though he was in his seventies by the 1930s, the Museum Committee decided there was no need to employ a younger curator.⁷⁰

Spurrier's Associate: William Harold Ingrams

William Harold Ingrams was the most active of the first group of voluntary 'keepers' of the Museum sections (see [Chapter 4](#)) and, as founding curator of the Historical and Native Industries sections, his contribution and perspective is of particular importance. He was a member of the committee that designed the Zanzibar display for the Wembley Exhibition of 1924, while also planning the Zanzibar Museum exhibits and enthusiastically working in the Museum in his spare time between 1925 and 1927. His involvement offers a counterpoint to that of Spurrier. Unlike the elderly curator, Ingrams analysed Zanzibar's culture methodically and scrutinised the Museum's collections with an anthropological eye. His time in Zanzibar, from 1919 to 1927, was characterised by his 'vigorous investigation into the history and ethnology of these islands'.⁷¹ His 1931 publication on *Zanzibar: Its History and Its People* was one of the first ethnographic surveys of the islands. Several characteristics made him 'qualified' to participate in the Museum: previous museum

experience, expertise in indigenous culture, a passion for research and an influential position in Government.

Ingrams arrived in Zanzibar in 1919 aged 21, having already shown an interest in museums and scholarship. Before being wounded in the First World War, he had been a classical scholar at Shrewsbury.⁷² After the war, he worked as an assistant master at the school and curated its Darwin (Natural History) Society museum.⁷³ His fellowships of various academic societies such as the Zoological Society, the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Royal Geographical Society indicate the seriousness with which he took his scholarship.

In an essay written in the 1950s reflecting on his time in Zanzibar, Ingrams explained his decision to accept this position.⁷⁴ His war experience made him 'receptive to the ideas of self-determination for small nations, then widely current'.⁷⁵ A post in Zanzibar had originally attracted him as he understood that, as an Arab Sultanate, it was further along the road to self-determination than other territories. On arrival, this illusion was rapidly dispelled. It was clear to him that the Protectorate Government was a formal empire in all but name where as 'a very young Assistant District Commissioner', he 'was the Poohbah in these stations and not a Zanzibari'.⁷⁶ His idealistic aspirations of working alongside the indigenous community to achieve self-determination were shattered as he witnessed first-hand the social and racial hierarchies maintained by the British administration. His personal perspective on empire differed from that of his older colleagues and fellow administrators. For example, to combat the failings of the Government he used his own personal initiative to build, in secret, a village school in Mkokotoni, Pemba, at a time when the Government refused to fund schools in the districts.⁷⁷

Ingrams served during an era of gradual modernisation in Zanzibar, driven forward during the Residency of Sir Claud Hollis (in post 1924–1929).⁷⁸ As Hollis's personal secretary from 1925, Ingrams was in an ideal position to assess the strengths of this modernisation, which struck him as an imperfect solution for colonial administration. For example, although the new road system improved infrastructure for agricultural benefit, the nature of administrative rule changed:

District Commissioners on donkeys were better for the country than D.C.s dashing through villages in a cloud of dust. If you're on a donkey you naturally gravitate to a *baraza* and drink a *madafu* [coconut] and talk with the locals. Intelligence is the first request in intelligent administration ... ⁷⁹

This observation is echoed in the sceptical reminiscences of colonial officers in other territories who viewed the projects of modernisation of the 1920s and 1930s as undermining effective administration on

the ground.⁸⁰

Ingrams's research into the history of Zanzibar led him to look positively upon the Arab rule prior to the British Protectorate era. He believed Zanzibar should not be described as 'misruled, backward and all the other derogatory things one can say of places which have not "enjoyed the benefits of enlightened western rule"'.⁸¹ His conclusions settled on the benefits of Arab rule rather than calling for a drive for greater empowerment or enfranchisement of the population at large. This indicates the influence of the Arab interpretation of history as articulated by the teachers at the Teacher Training School in Dole. Ingrams undoubtedly encountered these ideas via L. W. Hollingsworth, his co-author on the *School History of Zanzibar*, and director of the Teacher Training School.⁸² Ingrams supported this educated Arab elite in their claim for a future role in guiding the development of Zanzibar.⁸³

Ingrams's evaluation of Zanzibar's administration is important to consider at this stage as it informed his scholarly research. In his first post, as Assistant District Officer in Pemba from 1919 to 1924, Ingrams was able to carry out an in-depth study of this island's people and language. British presence was less intensive in Pemba than Unguja at this time, with only around 20 administrators stationed across the island. Such isolation for district officers provided amateur scholars across the Empire with the opportunity to conduct research.⁸⁴ Ingrams methodically collected ethnographic data and objects during this period, gathering a body of material for his later publications as well as linguistic skills and a greater cultural understanding of his situation.

In 1924 Ingrams relocated to Zanzibar town to act as Clerk of the Protectorate Council and soon after as Private Secretary to the British Resident. From this time on, he was closely involved in the Museum development as a keeper, member of the Committee and sometime Chairman. His proximity to the upper echelons of the Protectorate Government drew attention to the Museum's work. He was editor of the *Gazette* from 1924 to 1927 where he frequently contributed articles on Zanzibar's history and provided regular updates on the progress of the Museum. That he and Spurrier were both editors of the *Gazette* ensured that historical articles were given prominence. Through these myriad activities, Ingrams acted as a cultural mediator for the island in its representation to many audiences – in Britain, the international scholarly community and to the people of Zanzibar and East Africa.

Ingrams's publications give us the greatest insight into the nature of his scholarship and its impact upon the Museum. According to Hollis, he 'probably knows more about the Arabs and natives of

Zanzibar and Pemba than any other European'.⁸⁵ From 1924 to 1927 he contributed various articles to *Man*, the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and his handbook for the Zanzibar display at Wembley was particularly praised by a *Man* reviewer for its anthropological analysis.⁸⁶

Ingrams's period of service in Zanzibar coincided with significant changes in anthropological field research methodology and with a burgeoning interest in Africa by anthropologists.⁸⁷ Before the First World War, knowledge about Africa and its people had been for the most part recorded and collected by administrators, like Ingrams, many of whom published studies of the peoples they encountered.⁸⁸ Information was often collected following the standard questionnaire published in the *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*.⁸⁹ In the 1920s, Africa became the subject of greater academic interest. Anthropologists applied the new techniques of social anthropological field research, championed by Bronislaw Malinowski, to African peoples and cultures.⁹⁰ These anthropological studies of African societies benefited from British Government interest in welfare and education in the late 1920s. The London universities secured vital support from the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation to fund their research.⁹¹ The anthropologist 'in the field' began to replace the man 'on the spot' as the most reliable source of knowledge.

Ingrams's methods and data collection were typical of the administrator-anthropologist. He had no formal training and gleaned his methodology from reading *Man*, *Anthropological Notes and Queries* and other journals.⁹² In his most widely published work, *Zanzibar: Its History and its People*, published in 1931, he collated all his research and described his sources. He based the historical section upon the writings of his predecessors, Arab manuscripts, so-called 'Native Histories of Zanzibar and Pemba' (manuscripts of transcriptions of indigenous histories) and recollections of interviewees. More than half the book is dedicated to descriptions of 'the Native Tribes of Zanzibar' with accounts of rituals, law, agriculture, clothing, music and medicine, collected from his own encounters and observations. He scrupulously recorded these practices and illustrated them with photographs of objects and notes on their form, function and meaning.

The tone is undeniably the voice of the British administrator describing 'native' practices, using the traditional techniques of ethnographic observation. However, this was the first occasion on which the ways of life of Zanzibar's various communities had been the subject of such meticulous scrutiny. *The Geographical Journal* described it as 'the most valuable [work] yet written on Zanzibar' and

noted that the fame of Zanzibar of the nineteenth century meant writers overlooked ‘traditional’ life.⁹³ The book was not reviewed in *Man*, which may reflect the changing status of such works by colonial officers within anthropological circles.

In the 1930s, one administrator in the Zanzibar Government wrote that *Zanzibar: Its History and its People* contained many inaccuracies and was ‘from the anthropological point of view ... a mere scratching of the surface’.⁹⁴ In 1961, Cecil Thompson, the then curator of the Zanzibar Museum, judged Ingrams and his predecessors who wrote histories of Zanzibar as ‘amateurs, civil servants writing history as a hobby’.⁹⁵ The book’s republication in 1968 prompted a second round of reviews. In this very different intellectual climate, criticisms were levelled at Ingrams’s ‘haphazard’ work and more generally at the approach ‘from the Residency window, not from the bazaar’.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Ingrams’s research captured and recorded traditions that have since provided critical though subjective evidence for anthropologists and historians tracing the history of Zanzibar’s various communities.⁹⁷

While *Zanzibar: Its History and its People* brought knowledge of Zanzibar to an international audience, the *School History of Zanzibar*, co-authored by Ingrams and L. W. Hollingsworth, would have a greater impact upon the people of Zanzibar.⁹⁸ Hollingsworth had just become the Director of the Teacher Training School and was an inveterate supporter of the Museum, acting as Committee member from 1937 until his departure from the island in 1944. The book’s publication in 1925 coincided with the opening of the Museum. To ensure consistency with classroom work the historical exhibits in the Museum were organised chronologically according to the book’s sections.⁹⁹ Reflecting an overall historical perspective as accepted by Ingrams, Arab intellectuals and local oral histories, this narrative explained how Zanzibar’s prosperity was due to the interventions, incursions and influences from peoples beyond Africa. This important interrelationship between Ingrams’s research and publications, the Arab intelligentsia and the Museum will be examined more closely in [Chapter 4](#). Hollingsworth updated the text in 1929 and renamed it *Short History of East Africa*. These texts became the standard historical textbooks for schools across the region and therefore gained significant reach.

During his subsequent Colonial Office postings, Ingrams continued to research and publish, most notably on Arabia and Yemen, but, like many other administrators before and after him, he retained nostalgic sentiments for Zanzibar.¹⁰⁰ His publications and the displays in the Museum bore witness to his enduring influence as a scholar-administrator.

The Changing Context of Curating: Ailsa Nicol Smith

The correspondence in 1935 between the Resident, Richard Rankine, and the Chief Secretary, Samuel McElderry, after Spurrier's death, confirms the genuine difficulty the Government had in defining the Museum's role and the nature of its curatorship. The specialised nature of the work, low salary and lack of permanent and pensionable status were potential obstacles in attracting a professional curator to a remote colony. One interested candidate, Henry Andrews, had 'private means so that he is not wholly dependent on his salary', a position which certainly enhanced his prospects.¹⁰¹

McElderry saw two options ahead. One possibility, in order to restrict Government expenditure, was to place the Museum 'on a care and maintenance basis', with responsibility given to one of the 'East African pensioners' or 'possibly a retired Asiatic officer of Gov[ernment]t'.¹⁰² The second option, employment of a curator at Administrative Officer level costing £350 per annum, could only be justified 'on the extent to which the Museum in addition to its other functions can be made to assist these [medical, educational and agricultural] Departments in their activities'.¹⁰³ His colleagues highlighted the incongruity of this situation. The Director of Medical Services felt the proposals for the Museum were 'rather different from the usual aims of a museum'. If these were to be accepted, he believed a medical doctor would be the most appropriate person.¹⁰⁴ To complicate the issue further, McElderry had recently been corresponding with S. F. Markham, Empire Secretary of the Museums Association, in the hope of securing a Carnegie Grant for the Museum's educational activities from the MA's Empire Grants Committee. This application was dependent upon the appointment of 'a competent curator'.¹⁰⁵ McElderry was reluctant to abandon pursuing this promising source of funding because of the absence of qualified personnel.¹⁰⁶

The advertisement for the post appeared in *The Times* in July 1935, stipulating that: 'Candidates must have Museum experience and be qualified to assist on the educational side of Museum's activities, particularly in cooperation with Medical Department'.¹⁰⁷ It was recognised by the Government that an essential quality of a colonial museum curator was adaptability to a wide range of tasks. They must be ready to learn new skills and work beyond the parameters of their existing subject knowledge. Another quality necessary for colonial officers, which Sir Ralph Furse sought to discern in his interviewees, was the resilience to cope with tough tropical conditions and the

demanding social and racial settings in the colonies.¹⁰⁸

The candidates were whittled down to two: the aforementioned Andrews and Nicol Smith. Duncan Tovey, who had met both in the Colonial Office, believed Nicol Smith to be the more qualified candidate but it was appreciated that 'it is possible that local conditions may render it preferable that this appointment should not be held by a lady'.¹⁰⁹ Although Andrews had been championed by McElderry earlier, Rankine telegraphed the Colonial Office on 29 November 1935 to recommend that Nicol Smith be appointed.¹¹⁰ In his letter of confirmation, he wrote that due to the purdah system, he believed that 'a suitable woman' was in fact an advantage to ensure 'the educational side of the Museum [was] used to the best advantage'.¹¹¹ The opportunity presented by the curatorship in Zanzibar is significant not only for its creation of a Colonial Office post of curator, but also for the Zanzibar Government's stated preference for a woman. It is clear that under other circumstances, a man of private means might well have been offered the position in preference to a more qualified woman.

The expansion of academic research in Africa increasingly created opportunities for women, such as Margery Perham and Nicol Smith's fellow Newnham alumnae Audrey Richards and Gertrude Caton-Thompson. These celebrated scholars established themselves as experts in uncharted territory.¹¹² It would be inappropriate to equate Nicol Smith's contribution with those of these influential figures. However, her experience is significant as an example of a woman struggling to forge a career in a colonial setting. This was her first experience outside Great Britain; she needed to adapt to the new surroundings in order to negotiate the nuances of colonial society as a single woman. She faced challenges on all fronts: from her sex, the general lack of understanding of museum work, and doubts over the value of the Museum. These obstacles would ultimately cloud her palpable passion for her work and arguably prevented her from realising both her own, and the Museum's, full potential.

Nicol Smith, born in Aberdeen in 1908, developed both her interest in anthropology and her experience in museum work at the then Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology [CMAE hereafter] where, after graduating in 1930 from Newnham College Cambridge, she worked from 1931 to 1935 as assistant to the celebrated Dr Alfred Haddon.¹¹³ In a letter from 1930 to Haddon she explained that she wished to work with him having been unable to do a fourth year of study 'in order to qualify as an anthropologist'.¹¹⁴ She stated that the research area in which she was most interested was 'the position of women in Primitive Society' and she desperately sought the chance to work alongside trained anthropologists.

Haddon was one of the most significant British anthropologists and curators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹¹⁵ He influenced generations of scholars, and although Nicol Smith is not one of his celebrated students, she should be recognised amongst his pupils for her contribution to museums in East Africa.¹¹⁶ The experience of working with Haddon was formative upon the young graduate, not only in gaining practical museum skills but in witnessing his vision of what a museum could be. Haddon was convinced that museums must be educational institutions rather than the preserve of scholars. In his work at the Horniman and the CMAE, he tirelessly lectured and rearranged displays to encourage public understanding.¹¹⁷

Dr Louis Clarke, later director of the CMAE, who had substantial private means, provided payment for Nicol Smith's post in Cambridge. He frequently paid for assistants out of his own pocket to support the work of the poorly funded museum.¹¹⁸ Nicol Smith's tasks during her five-year assistantship included the cleaning, arranging and cataloguing of a large collection of objects from Papua New Guinea, writing handbooks, cataloguing photographs and creating new public displays.¹¹⁹ A colleague and long-standing friend wrote in her obituary that this latter task allowed Nicol Smith to indulge her 'artistic talents'.¹²⁰ She gained an understanding of anthropology in the museum environment: Haddon wrote in his letter of recommendation to the Colonial Office that, although Nicol Smith's academic training was in linguistics, she had 'for the past four years read much anthropological literature and has been in personal contact with many archaeologists, ethnologists, and sociologists, with whom she has discussed various aspects of their studies'.¹²¹ He also noted that she had attended courses on biology while in Cambridge and had sought for some time a post in Africa where she could work in the education sphere with women and children.

Haddon described Nicol Smith as efficient, able and indefatigable in her work, often working long hours unpaid – necessary qualities in the curatorial isolation that she would encounter in Zanzibar. After her departure, she maintained a link with 'my old museum in Cambridge' by donating objects and by corresponding with Clarke, Haddon and other former colleagues.¹²² The connection to Cambridge rooted her within a professional metropolitan sphere, providing her with academic kudos when dealing with the Zanzibar Government and fellow curators in Africa. Like Britons throughout the history of empire, Nicol Smith gained an opportunity for advancement within the colonial sphere that she would have struggled to achieve in Britain. For those who were prepared to move to Africa, especially women, anthropology and museums represented an accessible

professional avenue.¹²³

As with museums in Britain and across the colonial world managed by a single curator, Nicol Smith's responsibilities were varied and vast.¹²⁴ Her punishing list of official duties included expanding and documenting the collections, managing the Museum staff, devising new displays, creating exhibitions for outreach, conducting anthropological and archaeological research, writing academic articles, advising on the restoration of antiquities and historical sites across the island, carrying out archaeological surveys, teaching groups of all ages and backgrounds, managing the library service and keeping close accounts of the minimal museum budget. She needed comprehensive museum experience as well as a willingness to undertake scholarly, practical and educational work. She took on additional responsibilities to distribute war propaganda in 1940 as Assistant Information Officer. Her enthusiasm for the work, noted by the Provincial Commissioner in her personal annual reviews, must have provided the energy to tackle this taxing workload.¹²⁵ She expressed belief in the power of museums to provide a unique service in Africa:

a museum can contribute to the stimulation also of the less sophisticated African minds ... It is obvious that visual information makes a special appeal to illiterate people, even to those who are literate it supplies a concrete background to this new and complex world of science and Western civilisation to which the African is being introduced.¹²⁶

This approach appears to have motivated her throughout the struggles and was an argument she reiterated to the Zanzibar Government when they questioned the need for the Museum.

On her arrival in Zanzibar, she expressed an intention to bring the Museum up to international standards. This was an ambitious target in the tropical climate. The Zanzibar Museum presented several logistical and environmental challenges. Exhibits and activities were located in two adjacent buildings. The design of the main Museum was unsuitable for standard display cases and it frequently required repairs to leaks in the monsoon season. The intensity of the humidity was damaging to objects, especially organic material and documents. There was insufficient storage space for exhibits and only a small office and workshop. Such challenges required all her strength of character.

Nicol Smith's professional expertise in the region was recognised in 1939, when she was asked to design the opening display for the new King George V Memorial Museum in Dar es Salaam and to train the museum assistants. The proposed arrangement for the new institution used the Zanzibar Museum as its model.¹²⁷ Two trainees from Dar es

Salaam came to Zanzibar for four months from February to May 1940 for instruction in theoretical and practical museum work, which Nicol Smith believed was the first such course given in East Africa to Africans.¹²⁸ She also encouraged the trainees to study the history of the objects in the collections to ‘encourage an intelligent interest in their environment’.¹²⁹ She and Juma Rajab, the Zanzibar Museum Senior Assistant, then spent two months in Dar advising on the new displays.¹³⁰ Nicol Smith and Clement Gillman, founder of the King George V Memorial Museum, published an article about the collaboration in the *Museums Journal* in December 1941, nine months after her own article on Zanzibar in the same publication. These publications presented an opportunity to establish her name in the British and imperial museum network, as positive responses to her work in subsequent issues indicate.

A significant endorsement of her work also came in July 1940 when her Museum Report of 1939 was enthusiastically praised by Christopher Cox and the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC). Had it not been wartime, Cox would have circulated this report to all the African colonies as it showed what could be done ‘on £800 p.a. with a small Museum managed on up-to-date lines and conceived as an educational centre’.¹³¹ He was particularly excited by the training in Tanganyika Territory, the film experiments and the rural museum service. At the ACEC meeting of 18 July 1940, Margery Perham and Cox agreed that ‘the success of the Museum was due to its Curator, Miss Nicol Smith, who had gradually built it up with assistance from the Carnegie Corporation’.¹³² However, praise from the metropolitan centre did not silence the sceptics in the Zanzibar Government.

The creation of the museum in Dar es Salaam, and the increasing significance of the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi, draws our attention to the expanding museum scene in East Africa. During her tenure in Zanzibar, Nicol Smith enthusiastically supported attempts to bring the curators of these museums together. She felt keenly the challenge of working in isolation and the absence of a museum community. A request for advice in 1940 by the curator of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum prompted a lengthy and animated reply and she encouraged him to visit Zanzibar as ‘a Curator is a rare treat in these parts’.¹³³ Her attendance at the MA meeting in 1937 in London crystallised these issues for her: ‘a concourse of museum workers was not only refreshing but abounding in practical help for coping with the problems of an isolated overseas museum’.¹³⁴ She eagerly endorsed the proposal by Dr van Someren, curator of the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi, for a regional approach to museum development, submitted to the East African Governors’ conference in July 1937.¹³⁵ This

proposal foundered but Nicol Smith revived the discussion in 1941. She argued that in each of the East African territories, there was now a museum 'of sufficient standard to justify the position of the museum service in East Africa being considered as a whole'.¹³⁶ Together they could be recognised 'as one social service' and would all benefit from greater cooperation. Her resignation soon after circulating this document ended her involvement, although the principle of federation gained momentum. With the support of Margaret Trowell of Makerere University and Louis Leakey of the Coryndon Museum, the first conference of Curators of Museums in Central and Eastern Africa took place in 1945 in Nairobi.¹³⁷ Zanzibar was not represented at the group until 1957.

To broaden our picture of Nicol Smith's life in Zanzibar, it is worth briefly considering the experiences of other women posted there. The diaries and memoirs of Helen Haylett (née Wilson), a young woman employed as Private Secretary to the Chief Secretary in the late 1930s, provide an interesting counterpoint.¹³⁸ There were only 10 British women employed by the Zanzibar Government in 1937, all of them nurses except for Nicol Smith, Mrs Johnson (Superintendent of Female Education), and Wilson.¹³⁹ Wilson referred to Nicol Smith only twice: once when she recorded that their rooms were located in the same building. On another occasion, as part of the annual inventory of Government property, they were together responsible for auditing items in the Arab Girls' School – a task Wilson noted wryly in her diary she found somewhat arduous due to a late night of celebrations.¹⁴⁰ Wilson was a regular at the Club and part of the colourful party set, socialising with other young men and women, mostly younger wives or daughters of Government officers. It appears that Nicol Smith did not inhabit this social world. While she was invited to official occasions at the Residency, as recorded in the *Gazette*, it seems she did not ingratiate herself, either by choice or exclusion, in this lively but perhaps frivolous social scene.

'There is a limit to one's patience': Nicol Smith's Resignation

At the time of Nicol Smith's arrival in 1936, of the original supporters of the Museum, only Hollingsworth, Director of the Teacher Training School, remained on the island. One of her central tasks was therefore to revive support for the Museum. As a newcomer, she needed to establish her position and credentials with the Committee, who, as colonial administrators, had different priorities for the Museum from her own. A successful relationship between curator, Committee and

Government was fundamental to the Museum. Under Nicol Smith it began to falter.

Nicol Smith was supported by certain senior members of the administration, but others judged her enthusiasm and ambitions for the Museum as overbearing. She seems to have lacked diplomacy in dealing with colonial bureaucracy. Several examples illustrate the tensions in the Museum's problematic triangle of power. In one case, the Committee disagreed with Nicol Smith over the content of the Annual Reports. She wished to record the theft of a valuable enamel miniature and money from the Museum's donation box. Members of the Museum Committee did not see the need to publicise such unsavoury events and believed she exaggerated their significance. Nicol Smith defended the inclusion, explaining that this information was useful 'to my colleagues outside as well as within E. Africa. It is perhaps not known to the Committee that the exchange of ideas through annual reports between museums is their chief value'.¹⁴¹ She emphasised the Committee's inexperience of museum work to establish her possession of specialist professional knowledge while also indicating the importance of the wider colonial museum network.

In this case, Rankine, the Resident, supported the inclusion of the passage, a scenario typical of her relationship with the Government. When she was contradicted at Committee level, the Resident mediated and often supported Nicol Smith's suggestions. It might be inferred that her face-to-face communications blighted her dealings with these (all-male) committees. When she expressed her arguments on paper, rather than attending the Committee meetings, the Resident was able to see the rationality of her proposals.

Nicol Smith's campaign to make her post permanent and pensionable began in 1938 and ultimately became a debate about the essential function of the curator and the Museum. She was steadfast in her arguments for permanent and pensionable status. The Carnegie Grant regulations required a permanent curator. Officers at the British Museum had permanent and pensionable posts and she argued that colonial museums were an extension of this service. Above all, there was little appreciation of the 'scientific, educational and administrative activities' of the curator who was 'no less worthy of financial security than any other Government Official'.¹⁴² Sir Charles Law, then Chief Justice and Chairman of the Museum Committee, was publicly supportive of this application, describing her as 'an efficient curator, and [who] through her industry and experience, has put the Museum on a sound basis'.¹⁴³ Her apparently bold approach prompted the Provincial Commissioner to point out to the Chief Secretary that 'Government has, in Miss Nicol Smith, a real "live wire"'.¹⁴⁴ That her manner was perceived as somewhat audacious suggests the

Government may have had a more submissive kind of woman in mind when appointing a female curator.

McElderry, the Chief Secretary and instigator of the Carnegie Fund application, admitted in 1938 that 'it never seems to have been made clear' how the Museum's function fitted with the work of the Medical and Education Departments.¹⁴⁵ He himself was as guilty as any for allowing this ill-defined situation. He claimed that when the Museum was established there had never been an intention to have a permanent trained curator, but that a professional should visit once a decade to "clean up" the Museum. In his opinion, the Government could not afford a curator at £800 p/a 'just to keep the Museum up to scratch as an amenity'.¹⁴⁶ McElderry's earlier enthusiasm for the Museum seemingly had waned since his active lobbying for the Carnegie Grant. If Nicol Smith could be used 'to advance social welfare in co-operation with the social service departments' then he felt he could justify this expenditure. The Resident, Rankine, therefore asked the social welfare departments how Nicol Smith's work could be used to further their departmental agenda. The Senior Medical Officer felt she, as 'an untrained woman', had little to offer in the field of medical education:

I fear she would not be of any great use as an exponent of public health in the district. She is a woman and is likely to be disregarded on that count and also because she is unlikely to develop the personality to 'put it across' to her audience. Anyhow an African S.I. on £54 a year does much more than Miss N-S could ever hope to achieve.

... The African S.I.s carry out better propaganda, very cheaply, and nursing sisters and W.M.O.s do the same with women and children and have the knowledge to 'do something about' the conditions they encounter not just give advice – which few people would dream of taking!¹⁴⁷

The Director of Education agreed and felt that though her Museum work was useful, it was something of a luxury: 'There are essentials which should have priority'.¹⁴⁸ In the straitened economic conditions of the late 1930s, such financial arguments were persuasive. These revealing passages suggest the anecdotal nature of assessments of Government public health projects and their efficacy in communicating with rural populations. These episodes also reveal the complex matrix of race, gender and class in colonial settings.¹⁴⁹

In February 1940, Nicol Smith informed Markham of the MA that the Zanzibar Government had not confirmed her reappointment beyond the end of the year and that consequently the Carnegie Grant would have to be returned as the curatorship would lapse.¹⁵⁰ During the following months, the situation remained unresolved and Cox and others in the Colonial Office regretted the potential termination of the Museum's work. This uneasy situation was unsatisfactorily resolved by

the return of the grant and only later the confirmation of her reappointment.

Nicol Smith threatened to resign in 1941, citing difficulties over the bureaucracy associated with the Carnegie Grant as the reason. The Committee found her reaction melodramatic and the Chief Secretary described the issue as 'a molehill which is tending to become a mountain'.¹⁵¹ For Nicol Smith, this was the culmination of years of frustration. Her letter to the Provincial Commissioner included an impassioned lengthy outburst in which she described 'the numerous rejected proposals, the futility of my attempt at cooperation with the Social Welfare Coordination Committee, the fiasco of my meetings with the Trustees in 1938 owing to the ambiguous support from the Government, the consequent reduction of the Grant by £250, the failure to confirm the Curatorship when it was properly due' and concluded: 'There is a limit to one's patience'.¹⁵²

Early in 1941, the then Acting British Resident finally succeeded in making the post permanent and pensionable. Two reasons were given: an expansion of the Museum's educational work and a proposal to carry out an anthropological survey under the auspices of the Development Committee, the new incarnation of the Social Welfare Coordination Committee.¹⁵³ The Resident suggested that the curator oversee this research and thus have additional responsibility as the Government Anthropologist although the suggestion was not pursued.¹⁵⁴

Nicol Smith spent only a few months as a permanent member of staff. She resigned in August 1942 after relations with Government deteriorated further. The official reason for her resignation was her desire to support the war effort in Britain now that the Museum was in a condition such that she could leave it.¹⁵⁵ That she subsequently sought employment in Africa indicates there were other factors affecting her decision. Members of the Zanzibar Government were particularly frustrated by her resignation so soon after the post had been made permanent; it only served to reaffirm their opinion of her as emotional, capricious and impulsive.

Nicol Smith's life in Zanzibar set her on a subsequent career-path overseas. She taught initially in Rhodesia and Uganda. At Arundel School in Rhodesia she impressed her colleagues with her knowledge of African languages, but was deemed too eccentric in her teaching methods and liberal in her racial attitudes for the governors and parents.¹⁵⁶ She died in February 1967 in Penang, where she had been training teachers and helping to set up a new museum.¹⁵⁷ A few months before her death, she wrote to her friend and former Newnham tutor, Barbara White, that her personal mission had been 'to foster a love of education' and to make 'constant effort on behalf of

the African intellectual and good race relations between white and black'.¹⁵⁸ Her first position in the colonies in Zanzibar was formative in the development of this liberal attitude. In the paternalistic and racially defined context of the 1930s, she maintained a sympathetic approach to the local communities and their potential.

Nicol Smith's Associate: Muhammed Abdulrahman

On her resignation, Nicol Smith suggested that if funds were limited, 'the Museum might well be entrusted to Sheikh Muhammed Abdulrahman'.¹⁵⁹ He had 'considerable knowledge of the customs and history of the country' and:

... in the 7 years I have known him has shown more than anyone with whom I have come in contact within the Protectorate an appreciation of the uses of the Museum, has knowledge of it, has been recently working with me, is himself gifted with a scientific outlook and is experienced as a teacher.¹⁶⁰

The Zanzibar Government was not ready to employ an Arab curator.¹⁶¹ This statement nonetheless draws attention to his significance to the Museum. Not only was he an active Museum associate, one of the first non-European Committee members and a donor of objects who regularly brought students on visits to the Museum, but he conducted ethnographic research and published an article on Zanzibar's 'native' population, making him a notable successor to Ingrams in this field. He delivered a Basic English lecture in the Museum as part of its education programme in 1941.¹⁶² He also provided an intellectual link for Nicol Smith to the Arab teachers group whose members crafted their own narratives about the history of Zanzibar and its future as a modern nation.¹⁶³

During the late 1930s, Abdulrahman was stationed as school master in the Rural Middle School at Dole, approximately nine kilometres from Zanzibar Town. He was one of Hollingsworth's protégés as a graduate of the Teacher Training School, which was by 1935 also located in Dole.¹⁶⁴ Abdulrahman was an active member of this intellectual group. A variety of sources influenced these young men, including the Arab Association founded in 1911, which was itself inspired by pan-Arab movements; the *ulamaa* scholars who had been debating Islamic modernism in Zanzibar since the nineteenth century; and Hollingsworth and other British administrators.¹⁶⁵ Their universal interpretation of Zanzibar's history, in which Arab civilisation spread from its homeland to East Africa, was influenced by pan-Arabist ideas and corresponded with British views.¹⁶⁶

Abdulrahman regularly published in Hollingsworth's teachers' journal, *Mazungumzo ya Walimu*, a forum in which these young Arab

teachers developed their historical and political ideas. The historical stories he and his colleagues contributed to the journal told of powerful figures from Persia and Arabia establishing great city-states on the African coast. Abdulrahman contributed a particular series about the nineteenth-century history of the mainland where he described Arab explorers bravely entering the African hinterland to contend with cannibalistic Africans.¹⁶⁷ He acknowledged local oral informants as sources for these stories, which he reinforced with British colonial texts.¹⁶⁸

While stationed as a village school master, Abdulrahman collected ethnographic information, which became a useful source for Nicol Smith. In the late 1930s Abdulrahman wrote up his findings as an article. Nicol Smith organised for its publication in *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, after showing it to Dr Haddon, whom she visited in Cambridge while on leave in 1939.¹⁶⁹ She was impressed by Abdulrahman's 'keen sense of scientific values'. She felt his perspective was particularly valuable as he was an inhabitant of Zanzibar 'with his own comments on the transition from old to new ways, in addition to being a record of dying customs'.¹⁷⁰

The tone of this article corresponds with the intellectual vision of the young Arab elite. He positioned himself as an outsider to native life. His observations were methodically arranged and included information of use to the Government. For example, he described how the 'average native' was 'very suspicious' especially of foreigners and would deliberately misinform Europeans and Government officials if he found them inquisitive.¹⁷¹ The Chief Secretary supported the publication of the article and recommended it as reading for cadet officers. There had been interest in developing anthropological knowledge of the region since the mid 1930s to help the Assistant Officers with their work.¹⁷²

It is telling that in Zanzibar such research was published not by a British officer, but by an Arab school teacher, indicating the unusual circuits of knowledge on the island. Abdulrahman was also a writer whose interpretations of history not only reached his pupils but also, through the publication of his article and his influence on the Museum, spread his observations of 'native life' to a much wider audience. As an 'Arab ethnographer', fluent in kiSwahili, he was an ideal authority on whom the British felt they could rely, yet as we have seen he and his fellow teachers had a clear intellectual agenda. The Museum therefore acted as a conduit for an Arab historical narrative readily compatible with the prevailing British concept of Zanzibar's history, itself informed by Arab scholarly writing. This agenda was in turn shaped by their Zanzibari informants. In describing the entertainments of village communities, he wrote that

they recalled ‘long stories about the ghouls and Eastern Kings, something like those of the Arabian nights’. It must not be forgotten that this history of external influence existed beyond the British and Arab sphere, and predated it.

Abdulrahman died in late 1943, the year after Nicol Smith’s resignation, and with him the Museum lost one of its most important intermediaries and influential Arab thinkers.¹⁷³

The Museum Staff

In the history of any colonial institution, the story of the local actors is the hardest to access. They often appear as nameless shadows. A growing literature explores the role of these intermediaries who were critical in the functioning of the colonial state, whether as policemen, medical auxiliaries, teachers or research assistants.¹⁷⁴ These analyses expose how such figures exerted a hitherto unappreciated level of influence over their colonial masters who depended on their support and expertise.¹⁷⁵ Museum staff are important additions to consider within this context, as they were able to shape the knowledge acquired and displayed.

During the early years of the Zanzibar Protectorate, the majority of clerical and administrative staff members came from Indian communities. By the interwar years, the sons of prominent Arab families also held middling posts thanks to preferential treatment by the British administration. Descendants of immigrants from the Comoros islands, still known as Comorians, were a significant minority amongst Zanzibar’s intellectuals and professionals.¹⁷⁶ Whether within Government offices in Zanzibar town or as part of the Provincial Administration across the island, the Arab and Indian staff were in turn supported by lower-level officers and office-boys from the so-called ‘African’ communities.¹⁷⁷

The organisation of the Zanzibar Museum reflected this ethnic pattern of Government employment. The staff members remained relatively constant though most evidence of their work comes from the Nicol Smith period. Both she and Spurrier acknowledged their important contribution to the Museum. Both were predisposed to be positive, partly because they shared a relatively liberal outlook. Nicol Smith perhaps was also aware that their achievements would attest to her own capabilities as a curator and manager.

The letters of Aders and others to Spurrier recounted the successes and challenges encountered in training their assistants. Under Nicol Smith, the annual reports and official photographs provided a carefully constructed picture of the daily life of the Museum. Several

of these images were published in her article about the Zanzibar Museum in the *Museums Journal* of 1940. E. W. Wignall, editor of the *Museums Journal*, realised that this publication occurred at a difficult time for Nicol Smith and hoped to ‘do the Zanzibar Museum really proud’ by the inclusion of many photographs.¹⁷⁸ She clearly hoped to assert both her own professional standing and that of the Museum within the colonial setting. Tellingly, in the captions for the *Museums Journal* article she described the staff by their ethnic group, ‘a Comorian’, ‘an Arab’ etc., rather than by name. The Museum was presented as an institution that delivered benefits to all communities in the Protectorate using modern methods, thereby communicating both the importance of the Museum and indirectly the practical application of British rule in Zanzibar.

On the whole, Nicol Smith appears to have worked positively and harmoniously with the staff in spite of occasional frustrations which, in keeping with attitudes of the time, she attributed to their ethnic traits. She compared them favourably with her former colleagues: ‘I have only to think of my old museum at Cambridge to realise that they are the same breed of museum worker, devoted to the institution and gentle with things’.¹⁷⁹ In an article for the colonial education journal, *Oversea Education*, which came about by Cox’s recommendation, Nicol Smith described the whole staff as comprising ‘a European curator, a Comorian, an Arab and four Africans’.¹⁸⁰ Their annual salaries in 1939 give some indication of their relative status: the Curator received £395; Juma Muhammed Rajab, the Senior Assistant (Comorian): £135; Mzee Khamisi, Assistant (‘African’): £45; Muhammad Abdulla Juma al-Barwani, the Clerk (Arab): £36; Michael Stanislaus, Attendant (‘African’): £21; and Yakuti bin Kileo and Sopay bin Sheha, Cleaners (‘African’): £19.5 each.¹⁸¹

Figure 3.2 Staff of the Zanzibar Museum, 1937. Left to right: Yakuti bin Kileo, Mzee Khamisi, Juma Muhammad Rajab, Muhammad Abdulla Juma al-Barwani, Michael Stanislaus and Sopay bin Sheha (from 1937 report). ZNA: AV 32/50.

She was proud to report in her *Museums Journal* article that the attendants enjoyed ‘excellent relations with the very cosmopolitan public’ and ‘have personal pride in their status’.¹⁸² Nicol Smith believed their uniforms, which she had to lobby the Government to provide, contributed to this sense of self-esteem. The Acting Treasurer finally consented to these as ‘the Museum boys deal to some extent with strangers to Zanzibar ... it is important that they should look less “tough” than the average office boy’.¹⁸³ The uniform (Figure 3.2) ‘was the traditional costume of headmen in the Protectorate and gives them authority’.¹⁸⁴ It was based upon those worn by officials in the law courts, placing the Museum staff on a par with other Government

staff. Clothing was an important marker of identity and status amongst the Zanzibar's communities.¹⁸⁵ In the photographs, al-Barwani, the Arab clerk, wore European style clothing, with a red fez. Styles which fused Egyptian and European elements were popular amongst young Arabs at this time, indicating their modernity and awareness of Egyptian popular culture.¹⁸⁶ Juma Rajab, the Senior Attendant, covered his *kanzu* and white *kofia* with a Western jacket, perhaps denoting his seniority.¹⁸⁷

The retirement of the two longest-serving members of staff in 1940 was a blow to the Museum's fortunes, representing a significant loss of expertise and knowledge. Yakuti bin Kileo, attendant and messenger, and Sopay bin Sheha, collector and taxidermist, officially listed as attendants and cleaners, had both worked at the Museum since its opening in 1925.¹⁸⁸ The latter began as a butterfly collector at which he showed great aptitude although it was some years before he was given regular payment for this employment.¹⁸⁹

Juma Rajab, the Senior Assistant and carpenter, designed and made all the furniture for the building, undertook taxidermy and mounted all the objects. He had also been at the Museum since its opening and is probably the individual on whose behalf Spurrier campaigned in 1926 for an improved grade in salary 'so as to encourage him to stay for some years to come'.¹⁹⁰ Figure 3.3 shows him at work in the Museum's well-equipped workshop. In a paper given at the South African Museums Association conference in July 1941, Nicol Smith described Rajab as 'one of those invaluable people we all know in museums, or would like to possess, who can make anything'.¹⁹¹ He accompanied Nicol Smith to Dar es Salaam to train the new staff of the Museum there in 1941.

The clerk, Muhammad Abdulla Juma al-Barwani, came from the large and influential Barwani family which formed a significant part of the Arab intellectual elite. Another member of this family served as a Museum Committee member whose role will be discussed in Chapter 6. Al-Barwani's tasks were typical of office-work; he was responsible for 'typing, filing, petty cash and English-kiSwahili translations'. He kept records, created object labels, maintained the card index, organised government forms and oversaw the library.¹⁹² In Figure 3.4 he is pictured typing; it is worth noting that the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge at this time did not have a typewriter.¹⁹³ He spent time in the Education department in 1940 and subsequently reorganised the Museum's clerical system to fit with other Government departments. These improvements led to an increase in his salary.¹⁹⁴ His conduct was not uniformly positive. In late 1941, he appeared in court for drunken behaviour and temporary clerks were brought in.¹⁹⁵

Figure 3.4 Muhammad Abdulla Juma al-Barwani, Museum Clerk, in the Museum office, c. 1940. TNA: CN 3/24/4.

For the day-to-day supervision of the Museum, Nicol Smith placed two members of staff in the main Museum and two in the Annexe. The attendants worked from 7.30 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., though they were paid overtime when attending to public lectures and ‘when cinema is shown at night in the shamba [countryside]’.¹⁹⁶ The Senior Attendant was Mzee Khamisi, who also ran the cinema in the Museum and undertook outreach sessions in the districts and Pemba. Nicol Smith relied heavily upon Khamisi for his expertise and the respect he commanded. She believed him to be an ‘excellent exponent of exhibits in his charge’ and particularly praised his ‘real talent for exposition’.¹⁹⁷ It is unclear whether this latter quotation refers to oral explanation of the exhibits or the design of their display. In whichever case, he was clearly a vital interpreter for the kiSwahili-speaking visitors.

Khamisi indirectly left a personal record of his experience of working in the Museum. In 1953, he petitioned for a pension reflecting the full duration of his years of service. In this letter, Khamisi explained he was originally attached to the Public Health department in 1921 as a driver and unofficially assisted Aders with collecting.¹⁹⁸ He was transferred to the Museum in 1925 for the ‘duty of collecting specimen such as animals, birds, snakes, snails, butterflies, insects, shells etc. which formed the first exhibition of the Museum, which are on display today’.¹⁹⁹

Alongside his duties at the Museum, Spurrier instructed him to act as a driver to the Museum Committee members. In his letter, Khamisi pleaded that he be eligible for the full pension of unbroken Government service for 32 years: ‘It was not my fault that I used to drive the cars of Messrs. Crofton and Aders. I was just obeying orders of my superiors’.²⁰⁰ Khamisi’s experience gives a rare description by the staff of their work. It is also clear that even the most generous-spirited of Government officials – Spurrier and Aders – exploited the Museum staff for personal duties, a situation characteristic of colonial service.

Michael Stanislaus was another of the long-term attendants who undertook much of the cleaning. Nicol-Smith gave him responsibility for an exhibition in Pemba from February to April 1942.²⁰¹ He brought back ‘all specimens safely and showed considerable acumen while in charge’ and managed to handle 3,000 visitors, eight school visits with 113 children and a special day for women.²⁰² An

unpleasant incident occurred in 1941 when Stanislaus reportedly stole money from the petty cash. Nicol Smith defended him over this ‘lapse’, stating that he was ‘a devoted and most useful member of the staff’.²⁰³ Nicol Smith’s part-time successor as curator, James Robertson, however, believed that this episode illustrated the laxity within the management of the Museum. He echoed the opinions of other members of Government who increasingly doubted Nicol Smith’s competence.²⁰⁴

The attendant Muhammedi, who Nicol Smith hoped would succeed Khamisi, also undertook clerical work in her office. She described his varied skills, including basic skinning of animals, mounting of objects and specialising in “‘passe partout” work’.²⁰⁵ He was a vital ‘source of information on local crafts and lore’. She wanted a promotion for him as ‘at the moment he is not even earning a living wage’.

A suggestion was made in 1943 by Robertson that a ‘locally educated boy’ might be trained for the ‘post of Native Assistant Curator’, though to start with, he would be designated a ‘Museum Assistant’.²⁰⁶ In 1943, Himidi Msoma was employed as an assistant after the retirement of Juma Rajab. By 1952, Msoma had risen to the post of Senior Assistant.²⁰⁷ The curatorship post, however, remained in British hands until Sheikh Said Hilal al-Bualy, an Arab Committee member, took on the role in 1963 during the months leading up to independence.²⁰⁸ Msoma was the first permanent Government Archivist and Curator after the Revolution in 1964, in recognition of his experience and expertise. The suggestion made in 1943 did in fact come to fruition, though more by circumstance than by design.²⁰⁹

In Nicol Smith’s opinion: ‘The progressive life of a museum is bound up in the energy of a qualified curator who knows its needs and potentialities’.²¹⁰ She considered herself qualified as a museum professional. Before her, Spurrier had possessed different qualities and qualifications – as a longstanding, respected member of the local community and as a doctor – which enabled him to establish the Museum in Zanzibar’s society. There were similarities however. Both were unconventional characters and the Museum provided a space on the edge – literally and figuratively – of Government, for their interests and passions. Their respective associates provided essential support. Spurrier’s pioneering public health and education work established the Museum as a vital centre of education in the 1920s. Paradoxically, this prescient focus upon health and hygiene ultimately undermined the Museum’s mission – increased specialisation in the

relevant Government departments forced Nicol Smith to fight for the Museum's place in Government and the need for a curator.

Nicol Smith repeatedly attempted to explain the 'needs and potentialities' of the Museum to the Government but lacked the requisite diplomatic and political skills to transmit her message effectively. The response of Eric Dutton, then Chief Secretary, to Nicol Smith's detailed resignation memorandum and advisory document was typically condescending. He begrudgingly acknowledged her expertise:

With regard to the lady curator's letter and memorandum at (64), while it is true that she has a somewhat unattractive method of approach and is almost early Victorian in her methods of emphasis, she is an experienced professional and due consideration should, I feel, be given to her views.²¹¹

Her 'professional' advice was disregarded, however, and part-time curators were used for the next 13 years.²¹² With her resignation, an opportunity had been missed to redefine and reinvigorate the Museum as a centre for anthropological research. It was not until 1956 that the need to preserve the archives led to the creation of the full-time post of archivist-curator. This occurred thanks to the tireless lobbying of a figure at the top level of government, Sir John Gray, Chief Justice.

The Government consistently underestimated the skills needed to maintain the Museum and its popularity.²¹³ That the Museum survived at all was due to the dedication of the local staff. They maintained the collections, passed on skills to their successors and continued the Museum's activities under intermittent and often inexpert British supervision. They were the genuine professionals; permanent residents with specialised knowledge of museum work.

- 1 ZNA: DF 9/1, Ailsa Nicol Smith, Memorandum on the Management of the Museum, 27 July 1942.
- 2 William Henry Flower, *Essays on Museums and Other Subjects Connected with Natural History* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1898), 35.
- 3 Samuel Alberti has used Russell Belk's term to highlight the attachment of curators to their institutions in 'The Status of Museums: Authority', 63.
- 4 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1938* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1939), 2.
- 5 In his study of the rise of professional classes, Harold Perkin describes how professionals must 'live by persuasion and propaganda' to increase their status and income: Harold James Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989), 6.
- 6 For an overview of Cox's career, see Clive Whitehead, *Colonial Educators: The British Indian and Colonial Education Service, 1858–1983* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 188–205.
- 7 Gosden and Larson highlight that 'internal' and 'external' are not adequate descriptions for influential participants in the Museum: Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*, 32.
- 8 See Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment: The Rise of Social Anthropology in Britain and Africa, 1918–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Henrika Kuklick, 'The British Tradition', in *A New History of Anthropology*, ed. Henrika Kuklick (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 52–78; James Urry, *Before Social Anthropology* (Chur, Switzerland; Reading: Harwood Academic, 1993); Helen Tilley and Robert J Gordon, eds, *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
- 9 His name is spelled in different ways in the records; for consistency I shall use this spelling.
- 10 Glassman, 'Slower Than a Massacre', 742.
- 11 Increasingly this wider participation is being investigated in colonial cultural institutions, for example McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*; Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*.
- 12 ZNA: AB 86/323, Resident to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1935.
- 13 Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds, *Western Women and Imperialism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990).
- 14 Geoffrey D. Lewis, 'Collections, Collectors and Museums in Britain to 1920', in *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice*, ed. John M. A. Thompson (London: Butterworths, 1984), 36.
- 15 Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 15.
- 16 Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, 16.
- 17 Alberti, 'The Status of Museums', 59.
- 18 Lewis, 'Collections, Collectors and Museums in Britain to 1920', 35.
- 19 Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, 20.
- 20 Gaynor Kavanagh, 'The Museums Profession and the Articulation of Professional Self-Consciousness', in *The Museums Profession: Internal and External Relations*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 44.
- 21 Lewis, 'Collections, Collectors and Museums in Britain to 1920', 36.
- 22 Geoffrey Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation: A Centenary History of the Museums Association* (London: Quiller Press, 1989), 45.
- 23 Ibid., 46.
- 24 Ibid., 53–4: Funded by the CUKT, the MA introduced short courses on museum administration in 1930 and created an in-service diploma scheme in 1932 with first awards conferred in 1939. The Courtauld Institute in London introduced a diploma for art museum curators in 1932: Geoffrey D. Lewis, 'Museums in Britain: 1920 to the Present Day', in *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice*, ed. John M. A. Thompson (London: Butterworths, 1984), 40.
- 25 For example, responsibility for the British East African Protectorate was transferred to the Colonial Office in 1905 and, as we have seen, for Zanzibar in 1913.
- 26 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 27.

- 27 A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service: A History of HM Colonial and Overseas Civil Services, 1837–1997* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 28.
- 28 Ralph Furse, *Aucuparius: Recollections of a Recruiting Officer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 18.
- 29 Allen, ed., *Tales from the Dark Continent*, 22; Ronald Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and Trusteeship in the Colonial Empire', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. 4 The Twentieth Century*, ed. Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 239.
- 30 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 47.
- 31 Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*, 17.
- 32 Kirk-Greene, 'Introduction', xv.
- 33 Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*, 23.
- 34 RHL: MSS.Afr.s.1946/1, Haylett, An Account of my Two Tours as Office Assistant in the Secretariat, Zanzibar, 2; Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 62.
- 35 RCSL: SC.47.1.1921, Zanzibar Staff List, Europeans. The number was relatively stable throughout the 1920s, rising to a maximum of 120 in 1926, and falling again to 100 in 1937.
- 36 Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 38.
- 37 Ibid. 38; 155. Tropical medicine became a distinct area of medicine with the establishment of the schools of tropical medicine in London and Liverpool in 1899.
- 38 Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 174.
- 39 Claire Wintle describes colonial officers' wives lecturing at bazaars in Brighton in the 1900s: Claire Wintle, 'Visiting the Empire at the Provincial Museum, 1900–1950', in *Curating Empire*, ed. McAleer and Longair.
- 40 This society presented its collections as a museum in 1910, which was refounded as the Coryndon Memorial Museum in 1930, and has been known since 1964 as the Nairobi National Museum.
- 41 *Gazette*, Vol. XIII, No. 639, 27 April 1904, 2.
- 42 Examples of medical doctors becoming curators can be found across the Empire. In colonial medical discourse and practice, Africans were classified as groups and became 'subjects' of knowledge. Some comparisons might be drawn between medical practice and the discipline of curating: Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 8. In nineteenth-century Britain, Alberti has noted that there was a notable increase in museum positions being taken up by those with medical training, rather than those with an artisanal background. Alberti, 'The Status of Museums', 56.
- 43 ZNA: AB 41/1, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 June 1922. Edward Northey, then High Commissioner to Zanzibar, passed on requests from the Resident to Zanzibar.
- 44 Cave, *Three Journeys*, 55. These public health measures became a feature of the lives of doctors across the colonies: Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 42.
- 45 The office where rats were dropped off, now the Ministry for Health and Social Welfare, is still known amongst some local people today as 'Ofisi ya Panya' [Office of Rats]: Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 151.
- 46 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 137.
- 47 Ibid. 140.
- 48 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 67.
- 49 ZNA: CA 1/3, 'In Memoriam' booklet, 3.
- 50 ZNA: CA1/8, Aders to Spurrier, 21 April 1930. As seen in Chapter 1, this refers to the period before 1913 when Zanzibar was administered by the Foreign Office (F.O.), before transfer to the Colonial Office.
- 51 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 141.
- 52 Spurrier's approach to curatorship and his position in colonial society recalls that of John Lockwood Kipling, as described by Tim Barringer in *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 282.
- 53 T. O. Ranger, 'The Mobilization of Labour and the Production of Knowledge: The Antiquarian Tradition in Rhodesia', *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 4 (1 January 1979): 507–24. Medical practice provided more intimate settings for relationships between

administrators and local people. See essays in Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton, eds, *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

54 Richard Crofton recalled this practice, which he described as 'the centre of a personal service'. Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 140.

55 Several examples of such letters in kiSwahili are in ZNA: CA 1, Spurrier Papers.

56 Quoted in Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 141.

57 Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power*, 132.

58 Museums since the establishment of the South Kensington Museums had been centres for schools of art and industry: see Barringer, *Men at Work*.

59 ZNA: AB 41/1, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 June 1922.

60 BM Department Correspondence, Department of Ceramics and Ethnography, R. H. Crofton to T. A. Joyce, 15 January 1927.

61 Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation*, 45–6.

62 ZNA: CA 1/3, 'In Memoriam' booklet, 3.

63 For further discussion of medical and missionary practice, the 'great dispensary in the sky', see Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 55–76.

64 ZNA: CA 1/8, J. A. Pearson to Spurrier, 10 March 1930.

65 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 139.

66 Evelyn Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 343; Waugh, *Remote People*, 169.

67 RCSL: RCMS 180, Sinclair, 'Senex Africanus', 67.

68 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 139.

69 ZNA: AB 86/53, Resident to Chief Secretary, 12 February 1925.

70 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 March 1933.

71 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1850, 9 July 1927, 160.

72 RHL: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.428(5), W. H. Ingrams 'Zanzibar in Retrospect', proof copy from *Corona*, A.6948, April, (s.d.), c. 1956.

73 ZNA: AB 86/293, Ingrams: personal file.

74 RHL: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.428(5), Ingrams, 'Zanzibar in Retrospect'.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid. This refers to a character in the *Mikado*, Lord Pooh-Bah, who held multiple self-aggrandising honours.

77 Ibid.

78 Claud Hollis had long experience on the East African coast both as an administrator and as an amateur ethnographer. See Claud Hollis, 'The Masai', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 42, no. 168 (July 1943): 119–26; 'Zanzibar: Present Conditions and Interests', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 28, no. 111 (April 1929): 217–23.

79 RHL: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.428(5), Ingrams, 'Zanzibar in Retrospect'.

80 Allen, *Tales from the Dark Continent*, 26; Kirk-Greene, 'Introduction', 26.

81 RHL: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.428(5), Ingrams, 'Zanzibar in Retrospect'.

82 W. H. Ingrams and L. W. Hollingsworth, *School History of Zanzibar* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1925).

83 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 43.

84 Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 174.

85 ZNA: AB 86/293, Ingrams: personal file.

86 For example W. H. Ingrams, '99. Marine Fish-Traps in Zanzibar, Pemba, South India and Brazil', *Man* 24 (1924): 132–33; W. H. Ingrams, '86. The People of Makunduchi, Zanzibar', *Man* 25 (1925): 138–42. G. A. Wainwright responded to the latter article, discussing the close relationship of New Year traditions in Zanzibar and Egypt: G. A. Wainwright, '192. The Egyptian Origin of the New Year's Sacrifice at Zanzibar', *Man* 40 (November 1940): 164–7. In 1925 Ingrams's handbook for the Wembley Exhibition 'stood out' for its detailed ethnological study and the reviewer hoped Ingrams would publish a book to give a 'permanent setting' to his findings: C. W. H., 'Review: 109', *Man* 24 (1924): 144.

87 In other regions, such as the Pacific, anthropologists had already undertaken lengthy fieldwork themselves, following the Torres Strait expedition of 1898, which marked the major

shift in the study of anthropology: Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 218. Before this, 'armchair anthropologists' in the UK readily received data for interpretation, and the practice also enhanced the status of the administrator: Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 132. See also: Goody, *The Expansive Moment*; Helen Tilley, 'Introduction', in *Ordering Africa*, ed. Tilley and Gordon.

88 Colonial officers published articles in journals such as *Man*, *Tanganyika Notes and Records* and *The Uganda Journal*. There were two academic surveys, both commissioned by the Government: C. G. Seligman in 1909–1912 and Northcote Thomas in Southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone in 1909–1910. The British Museum supported Emil Torday's trip to collect in the Congo in 1907–1909. Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 38–9.

89 Kuklick, 'The British Tradition', 57; Urry, *Before Social Anthropology*, 102.

90 The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, established in 1926, brought together administrators, anthropologists and missionaries and disseminated their work through its journal *Africa*.

91 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 58; Kuklick, 'The British Tradition', 71.

92 For the development of British anthropological field methods from 1870 to 1920, see Urry, *Before Social Anthropology*, 17–40.

93 R. S.-R., 'Review', *The Geographical Journal* 78, no. 2 (1931): 177. See also F. H. M., 'Review', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 30, no. 121 (October 1931): 445–6.

94 ZNA: AB 31/14, Memorandum from Acting Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 19 July 1935.

95 ZNA: AD 5/17, Thompson to Private Secretary (Chief Minister), 22 April 1961. Thompson considered Reginald Coupland as the only 'professional historian of Zanzibar'. Coupland had visited in 1928 to consult the archival records for his books on Kirk and the British in East Africa: Reginald Coupland, *Kirk on the Zambesi: A Chapter of African History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928); *East Africa and Its Invaders*.

96 John Middleton, 'Review', *Man* 3, no. 2 (June 1968): 332; Iain R. Smith, 'Review', *The Geographical Journal* 134, no. 3 (1968): 425.

97 Abdul Sheriff's foreword to the 2007 reprint of the text acknowledges the importance of these books, which despite their shortcomings, show how colonial officers 'found the time and energy to collect and preserve for posterity such important information about the territories under their control': Abdul Sheriff, 'Foreword' in Ingrams, *Zanzibar: Its History and its People*, xii. Ingrams's observations are used by scholars of Zanzibar including Sheriff, Fair, Glassman and Bissell.

98 The book was used by senior classes in schools and in the Teacher Training School. ZNA: BA 18/15, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1925, 80.

99 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1939* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1940), 3.

100 RHL: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.428(5), Ingrams, 'Zanzibar in Retrospect'. Ingrams was posted in 1927 to Mauritius, then to Aden in 1934. Robert Fletcher has researched Ingrams's role as a 'desert officer' and his study of Bedouin martial races. See Robert S. G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and the 'Tribal Question': Desert Administration and Nomadic Societies in the Middle East, 1919–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

101 ZNA: AB 41/3, Chief Secretary to Resident, 13 July 1935.

102 ZNA: AB 41/3, Chief Secretary's note on Andrews' application, 13 July 1935.

103 ZNA: AB 41/3, Chief Secretary to Henry Andrews, 15 July 1935.

104 ZNA: AB 41/3, Director of Medical Services to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1935.

105 ZNA: AB 41/3, S. F. Markham to Chief Secretary, 17 July 1935.

106 ZNA: AB 41/3, Chief Secretary to Resident, 13 July 1935.

107 'Public Appointments', *The Times*, 16 September 1935, 2.

108 Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 39.

109 TNA: CO 618/63/3, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Resident, 15 November 1935.

110 TNA: CO 618/63/3, Resident telegram to Colonial Office, 29 November 1935.

111 ZNA: AB 86/323, Resident to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1935.

112 Gertrude Caton-Thompson, *Mixed Memoirs* (Gateshead: Paradigm, 1983); Kuklick, 'The British Tradition', 73; Lyn Schumaker, 'Women in the Field in the Twentieth Century:

Revolution, Involvement, Devolution', in *A New History of Anthropology*, ed. Kuklick, 277–92; Jo Gladstone, 'Significant Sister: Autonomy and Obligation in Audrey Richards' Early Fieldwork', *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 2 (May 1986): 338–62.

113 She was a capable student, taking her degree in Modern and Medieval Languages and receiving an exhibition in her second year: Newnham College Archive, Cambridge, (NCA hereafter): Newnham College Roll Record for Ailsa Nicol Smith.

114 Cambridge University Library: Alfred Cort Haddon Papers, GB 012 MS.Haddon/4, Nicol Smith to Haddon, 28 December 1930.

115 S. Preetha Nair, 'Edgar Thurston at the Madras Museum (1885–1909): The Multiple Careers of a Colonial Museum Curator', in *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, McAleer and Longair, 168–87.

116 Sandra Rouse discusses the impact of his work at Cambridge upon his pupils (both formal and informal – Caton-Thompson informally attended his lectures in 1923): Sandra Rouse, 'Expedition and Institution: A. C. Haddon and Anthropology at Cambridge', in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50; 71.

117 Anita Herle, 'The Life-Histories of Objects: Collection of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait', in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait*, ed. Herle and Rouse, 99–100; Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*, 12; A. Hingston Quiggin, *Haddon the Head Hunter: A Short Sketch of the Life of A. C. Haddon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 142.

118 Archive of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (CMAA hereafter): Maureen Hutton to Ms. Cra'ster, (s.d.) c. July 1958.

119 CMAA: Annual Report of the Faculty Board of Archaeology and Anthropology on the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology and its Library for 1931, (Cambridge, 1932), 1.

120 NCA: Newnham College Roll Letter, Ailsa Nicol Smith Obituary (Cambridge, January 1968), 57. Alison Hingston Quiggin, the author of this obituary, collaborated with Haddon on their *History of Anthropology* and wrote one of the earliest biographies of him, *Haddon the Head Hunter*. Her own publications include the *History of Primitive Money*. She may have been something of a mentor to Nicol Smith, having herself started her career as an assistant to Haddon in the 1900s.

121 Quoted in TNA: CO 618/63/3, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Resident, 15 November 1935.

122 Archives of the National Museums of Tanzania (NMT hereafter): AM101.D33/R46, 17. This text was originally presented by Nicol Smith as a paper for the Annual Meeting of South African Museums Association in July 1941 and later published in South African Museums Association Bulletin as 'Two East African Museums'.

123 See also Ethal Fegan, the librarian of the Haddon library from 1920–1930: Herle, 'The Life-Histories of Objects', 101, n. 73. Fegan subsequently worked in Nigeria and the Gold Coast setting up libraries: Anthony Olden, *Libraries in Africa: Pioneers, Policies, Problems* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 59–63.

124 See essays in McAleer and Longair, eds., *Curating Empire*.

125 ZNA: AB 86/324, Annual Confidential Report on Ailsa Nicol Smith, 3 November 1937.

126 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum 1939*, 1.

127 Clement Gillman and Ailsa Nicol Smith, 'A Museum in Tanganyika: King George V Memorial Museum, Dar Es Salaam', *Museums Journal* 41, no. 8 (November 1941): 170.

128 *Annual Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum 1939*, 4.

129 *Ibid.*, 5.

130 ZNA: DF 9/10, Nicol Smith to Provincial Commissioner, 16 October 1940.

131 TNA: CO 618/76/15, Circulated note by Educational Advisor, 16 July 1940.

132 TNA: CO 618/76/15, Extract from Minutes of ACEC Meeting, 18 July 1940.

133 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith to curator J. D. Clark, 17 June 1940. The David Livingstone Memorial Museum had been established in 1934.

134 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum 1938*, 3.

135 ZNA: AB 41/19, Dr Van Someren, Memorandum, 15 July 1937.

136 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1941* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1942), 6.

- 137 ZNA: AB 41/6, Report on conference of curators, Nairobi, 9 June 1945. Louis Leakey was at curator at this time at Coryndon Museum in Nairobi, bringing recognition to the region through his ground-breaking archaeological discoveries: G. Isaac and E. McCown, *Human Origins: Louis Leakey and the East African Evidence* (London: W. A. Benjamin, 1976); Staniforth, 'Becoming Human'.
- 138 RHL: MSS.Afr.s.1946/1, Haylett, 'An Account of my Two Tours', 2
- 139 This ratio of female officers across departments was typical in British Africa. Across the continent, from 1922–1943, 83 women were employed in education, 72 for medical posts, 8 for 'miscellaneous' posts and 2,189 as nursing sisters: Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, 14.
- 140 RHL: MSS.Afr.s.1946/1, Haylett, 'An Account of my Two Tours', 9.
- 141 ZNA: AB 41/5, Nicol Smith to Museum Committee, 2 June 1942.
- 142 ZNA: AB 86/323, Nicol Smith to Museum Committee Chairman, 14 April 1938.
- 143 ZNA: AB 86/323, Museum Committee Chairman to Provincial Commissioner, 14 April 1938.
- 144 ZNA: AB 86/323, Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 17 April 1938.
- 145 ZNA: AB 86/323, Chief Secretary to Assistant Secretary, 6 May 1938.
- 146 Ibid.
- 147 ZNA: AB 86/324, Senior Medical Officer to Chief Secretary, 1 August 1939.
- 148 ZNA: AB 86/324, Note by Chief Secretary, 18 August 1939.
- 149 For a comparable case, where female nurses did not behave as the authorities expected, see Dea Birkett, 'The "White Women's Burden" in the "White Man's Grave": The Introduction of British Nurses in Colonial West Africa', in *Western Women and Imperialism*, ed. Chaudhuri and Strobel, 177–191.
- 150 TNA: CO 618/76/15, Nicol Smith to Markham, 22 February 1940.
- 151 ZNA: DF 9/10, Chief Secretary to Provincial Commissioner, 24 September 1941.
- 152 ZNA: DF 9/10, Nicol Smith to Provincial Commissioner, 30 September 1941.
- 153 ZNA: AB 86/323, Acting Resident to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 April 1941.
- 154 This role, which more explicitly aligned anthropology with colonial governance, existed elsewhere in the empire, notably with R.S. Rattray in the Gold Coast.
- 155 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith to Museum Committee Chairman, 14 July 1942.
- 156 Dorothy Twiss and Rosemary Cochrane, *Grace and Learning from Africa: Arundel School – the First Fifty Years* (Harare: Arundel School, 2005), 36–8. I am grateful to Martin Walsh for bringing this book to my attention.
- 157 NCA: Nicol Smith to Barbara White, 26 January 1967.
- 158 NCA: Nicol Smith to White, 9 August 1957.
- 159 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942, 3.
- 160 Ibid.
- 161 The response to a suggestion by the new Resident in 1943 that the Museum resume its role in propaganda, was 'that no Arab could undertake the work of the dissemination of information regarding the work of departments without supervision': ZNA: AB 41/2, Note of meeting with Provincial Commissioner, Director of Agriculture, Director of Education and Senior Medical Officer, 18 December 1942.
- 162 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum 1941*, 4.
- 163 Glassman, 'Slower Than a Massacre', 738.
- 164 Ibid., 737.
- 165 Ibid., 739.
- 166 Ibid., 741.
- 167 This series was published in 1938: Glassman, 'Slower Than a Massacre', 742.
- 168 Ibid.
- 169 ZNA: AB 31/14, Nicol Smith to Chief Secretary, 9 May 1939; Muhammed Abdurahman (sic), 'Anthropological Notes from the Zanzibar Protectorate', *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 8 (December 1939): 59–84.
- 170 ZNA: AB 31/14, Nicol Smith to Chief Secretary, 9 May 1939.
- 171 Abdurahman, 'Anthropological Notes from the Zanzibar Protectorate', 77.
- 172 ZNA: AB 31/14, Acting Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 19 July 1935.

1. 173 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1943 and 1944* (Zanzibar, 1945).
- 174 See Parsons, 'African Participation in the British Empire', 163; Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); John Iliffe, *East African Doctors: A History of the Modern Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Maryinez Lyons, *The Colonial Disease: A Social History of Sleeping Sickness in Northern Zaire, 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*; Dirks, 'Colonial Histories and Native Informants', 279–313; Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, eds., *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London: British Academic Press, 1994); *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, eds., Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts.
- 175 Schumaker demonstrates how researchers were able to 'Africanize' the practice of anthropology in the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute: Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*. See also Leslie Bank, 'Home-Made Ethnography: Revisiting the "Xhosa in Town" Trilogy', *Kronos*, no. 28 (1 November 2002): 146–71.
- 176 Some Comorians claimed Arab status, though they could appear 'African' physically, therefore they could manoeuvre between these identity markers: Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 288.
- 177 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 178 TNA: CO 618/76/15, Educational Adviser to ACEC. member Herbert Scott, 4 February 1941.
- 179 NMT: AM101.D33/R46, Nicol Smith, Speech to South African Museums Association meeting July 1941, 17.
- 180 Ailsa Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', *Oversea Education* XII, no. 2 (January 1941): 105.
- 181 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-El-Amani), 1939* (Zanzibar, 1940), 9.
- 182 Ailsa Nicol Smith, 'A Museum in East Africa: A Pictorial Description of Some of the Activities of the Peace Memorial Museum, Zanzibar', *Museums Journal* 40, no. 12 (March 1941): 317.
- 183 ZNA: DF 9/10, Acting Treasurer to Chief Secretary, 9 March 1937.
- 184 Nicol Smith, 'A Museum in East Africa', 317.
- 185 Laura Fair, 'Dressing up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar', *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (January 1998): 63.
- 186 Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, 76.
- 187 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 188 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1943 and 1944*, 4.
- 189 ZNA: CA 1/2, Aders to Spurrier, 23 June 1925; CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 21 July 1928.
- 190 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 47; ZNA: AB 41/1, Note from Spurrier, May 1926.
- 191 NMT: AM101.D33/R46, Nicol Smith, Speech to SAMA meeting July 1941, 17.
- 192 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942, 1.
- 193 In discussion with Margaret Greeves, former Assistant Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum.
- 194 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1940* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1941), 4.
- 195 ZNA: AD 5/94A, Nicol Smith to Director of Education, 1 December 1941; J.D. Robertson to Provincial Commissioner, 11 February 1942.
- 196 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942, 2.
- 197 Nicol Smith, 'A Museum in East Africa', 316; *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1936* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1937), 8.
- 198 ZNA: AD 5/94A, Mzee Khamisi to Chief Secretary, 9 February 1953.
- 199 *Ibid.*
- 200 *Ibid.*
- 201 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-El-Amani) 1941*, 1.
- 202 *Ibid.*
- 203 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942, 2.
- 204 ZNA: AD 5/94A, Robertson to Provincial Commissioner, 11 February 1942.

- 205 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942, 2.
- 206 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1942* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1943), 3.
- 207 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, (Beit-el-Amani) 1952* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1953), 1.
- 208 ZNA: AD 5/101, Minutes of the Peace Memorial Committee, 16 January 1963.
- 209 ZNA: AD 5/92, Himidi Msoma, Archivist/Curator to Mwandishi Mkuu, Wizara ya Elimu na Mila, 12 October 1964; Museums Association, *Museums Calendar 1965* (London, 1965) 96.
- 210 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1938*, 2.
- 211 ZNA, AB 41/2, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 1 September 1942.
- 212 G. A. Porteous, Acting Curator in the 1950s, found the Museum administration in a challenging state: ZNA: AD 5/103, Acting Curator to Chief Secretary, 24 January 1953.
- 213 Cecil Thompson was sceptical on being told when appointed as archivist-curator in 1956 that the Museum would not take up much time. He believed responsibility for it alone was more than a full-time job: Cecil H. Thompson, 'Tropical Island Museum', *Corona* 13, no. 9 (September 1961): 341.

Trusteeship of Culture: Acquisition and Display of the Museum's Collection, 1925–1942

Ailsa Nicol Smith considered the preservation of 'local art treasures and antiquities' to be 'part of our trusteeship'. Her obligation therefore was to ensure the collection 'shows and explains their culture, past and present, to the natives of the territory'.¹ Her use of the term 'trusteeship' alludes to the ideology applied by the British Government to describe its responsibilities to its territories in the interwar period. It also relates to the practice of salvage ethnography – the justification by colonial powers that collecting objects preserved 'dying' indigenous cultures.² This chapter will explore trusteeship in the more specific context of acquiring and exhibiting the Zanzibar Museum's collections.

Even though, as we have seen, the acquisition and display of objects in East Africa was not a new phenomenon, the deliberate construction of a museum collection of historical and ethnographic material was a novel exercise in Zanzibar. The intention to provide instruction guided the assemblage of material culture and natural history specimens. Chinese ceramics, for example, were not only a symbol of the cosmopolitanism or wealth of their owner; they now represented centuries of Zanzibar's history and interaction with the wider world. British judgements of historical and anthropological value determined which narratives the objects symbolised. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, such interpretations of history were influenced by local ideas about Zanzibar's past. This period also coincided with an increasing recognition of the aesthetic value of African objects in Europe.³

Few scholars have made reference to the Zanzibar Museum's colonial-era display. Mark Horton, writing in 1992, gave a broad-ranging analysis of the Museum, which has formed the primary reference point for subsequent discussions of this collection:

Between 1925 and 1964 a very mixed collection was built up of artifacts, antiquities and items of biological interest ... with relatively little regard to theme or historical sequence; a cornucopia of miscellany. ...

As with other African museums set up in the British period, the outlook and design of this new institution was heavily biased towards a colonial view of the past. Africa was seen as essentially culture-less; civilisation was introduced by outsiders. ... The displays were heavily biased to Zanzibar's "invaders" be they Arab traders,

Portuguese or British colonists or the ruling Bu'saidi sultanate. There were a limited number of ethnographic items, but these were inadequately displayed or explained.⁴

Sheriff, Voogt and Luhila offer a more recent analysis:

The design of the exhibits in the Peace Memorial Museum betrayed another colonial trait. The dominant perspective was anthropological rather than historical. Africa was not considered a historical continent, but, in line with social Darwinism of the times, as a laboratory for earlier forms of human civilisations. It had plenty of photographs and costumes 'typical' of the different ethnic groups in Zanzibar, emphasising their diversity rather than the process of homogenisation characteristic of the Swahili culture. The museum's central rotunda featured the exploits of the colonisers and their agents, while the hexagonal wings were devoted to such themes as the arts, local industries, traditional beliefs, communication, etc., presented in a rather static way.⁵

At the time of writing, these three scholars and museum practitioners were engaged in a collaborative project to redisplay the Zanzibar National Museum in the House of Wonders with the local staff. Their comments therefore signal the intentions behind their future plans and reflect contemporary thinking on the construction of Swahili identity as well as implicating the Zanzibar Museum in perpetuating colonial social concepts.

This chapter will probe more deeply into the evidence of the Museum's display and its rationale to test the validity of these judgements. It cannot be denied that such general statements broadly capture British colonial attitudes to culture and exhibition. From the evidence of the original 1925 display, Horton's description of the history of 'invaders' is reflected in the records, guidebooks and photographs, but by relating these to Glassman's work, we can make a more nuanced reading of this historical narrative. These accounts both overlook the changes and transformations in the display, responding to funding, acquisitions and the enthusiasms of curators. The photographic and written sources reveal an experience characteristic of working in a museum in any context or climate, where staff responded to political, economic and social circumstances more often than ideology. My intention is to uncover the more complex histories of the construction of these displays including the intricate stories embodied within several of the objects.

While many museums stagnated towards the decolonisation period, meticulous analysis into their records reveals how many museums actively changed their displays, responding to local interest and global trends. In the case of Zanzibar, hitherto unknown records reveal an early expansion of the exhibitions as early as 1927. Ingrams organised this temporary display, which was open for less than three years. It represents an unusual and progressive exhibition for its time that has been overlooked in the historical record. Archival documents reveal

such transient displays and also the failures: objects not acquired, decisions over the spending of funds and exhibitions planned but not realised. Furthermore, members of all Zanzibar's community informed the direction of the Museum to a far greater extent than has been hitherto recognised, such was the dependency of the curator upon local people as experts, collectors, donors and visitors. The agency of these local participants, and the ways in which it manifested itself, is an important strand in this chapter. These factors greatly enrich our understanding of the significance and meaning of the colonial museum.

Tracing the creation of the Zanzibar Museum's displays has revealed a fascinating story of exchange between the metropole and the colony. The Zanzibar Court at the Wembley Empire Exhibition was a vital precursor to the Museum. Opened in 1924, this hall became a prototype for the narrative and organisation of the Zanzibar Museum's inaugural display a year later. The interplay between these two displays laid the foundations for the history taught in the Zanzibar Museum and the islands' schools throughout the colonial period. The significance of the detailed and extensive handbook accompanying the Court has yet to be appreciated for its enduring legacy within Zanzibar. Analysis of this exhibit will foreground the examination of the Zanzibar Museum collection through the processes of acquisition – donations, purchases and archaeological salvage – and display. A newly discovered set of photographs from 1926 to 1927 permits a close examination of the Museum displays, where I focus upon the Historical section. The public health exhibits will be examined in [Chapter 5](#), as they relate closely to the educational and welfare activity of the Museum.

The intention of this chapter is not to reconstruct a comprehensive list of the Museum's collection, but to consider the phases in acquisition and display that reveal particular themes pertaining not just to the study of Zanzibar but also more widely to material culture, display and colonialism. For example, the biography of one particularly ideologically charged set of objects, the regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu (comprising the sacred drums, horns and ceramic rice bowl), illustrates clearly the contingencies and compromises in colonial museum displays. These include the changing meanings of objects, the pressure of financial circumstances, the power of external stakeholders over the collection and the interplay of local and global forces in museum histories.⁶

Constructing Zanzibar at Wembley⁷

The colonial interpretation of Zanzibar's history was first publicly

displayed in the British Empire Exhibition in 1924–25. The wider story of Wembley, its expressions of imperial identity and huge financial loss, has been discussed elsewhere; the focus here will be specifically upon locating the meaning of the Zanzibar Court.⁸ While responding to the overall Exhibition aims to encourage commerce around the Empire and to celebrate its grandeur, breadth and diversity, the Zanzibar Organising Committee had its own particular ambitions.⁹ From the Court's handbook we learn that the display should educate the British public, whose limited knowledge of the Protectorate was 'chiefly as a musical-comedy name and secondly as vaguely connected with Heligoland', enduring preconceptions already discussed in [Chapter 1](#).¹⁰ The Exhibition as a whole represented many views of British Africa, and a central objective of the Zanzibar room was to differentiate the Protectorate from its neighbouring territories in the courts alongside.¹¹

Almost all territories participated, and Zanzibar did so enthusiastically. The Indian threat to boycott the Exhibition in objection to British policy towards Indians in Kenya demonstrated the potential leverage that participation implied.¹² The African section of the Wembley exhibit, with three large pavilions devoted to 'the Three Africas' (West Africa, East Africa and South Africa), reflected the renewed interest in the continent in the interwar period.¹³ Each territory's government hoped to attract public and commercial interest, and their exhibits competed for the attention of the visitors, through exhibits of raw materials, manufactured objects and, in some of the West African rooms, indigenous craftsmen undertaking practical work.¹⁴ The popularity of items sold during the Exhibition was a source of pride for the organising committees. In 1925 'dainty bags' of cloves were on sale in the Zanzibar section for 6 d., along with mats and bags, while 'the range of comfortable Pemba stools' caused 'quite a sensation'.¹⁵

The organisation of the Zanzibar section was led by Dr Francis Charlesworth, the representative in London nominated in 1922, and a local committee, convened in 1923 to collect exhibits and headed by William Hendry, Director of Education with Ingrams amongst its members.¹⁶ Unlike the London Advisory Committee for the India pavilion, which included several leading London-based Indians, it was an entirely British committee.¹⁷ Charlesworth had been a surgeon in Zanzibar from 1887 to 1921, and was an old colleague of Spurrier's in the medical section. His formative years on the island coincided with the Foreign Office period, which as we have seen was characterised by its small, insular community. This may account for the strong echoes of the image of Zanzibar at Wembley with that projected in the Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905 – one based around the twin cultural and

commercial strengths: the exotic Sultanate and clove production.

While Zanzibar's exhibits were limited to a single room, the East African pavilion was designed as an Arab-style palace with a carved Zanzibar door at the entrance; thus the Arab legacy that lived on conspicuously in Zanzibar framed the entire region.¹⁸

The Zanzibar Court retained the regal essence of the joint government of the Sultanate, with the Union Jack and the Sultan's flag crossed over the entrances and the Sultan's coats of arms displayed between portraits of Sultan Barghash and the current Sultan, Khalifa bin Harub (Figure 4.1). These formal portraits were atypical of displays in the East and West African pavilions, and served to present the unique identity of Zanzibar: a sophisticated regal Arab state as well as productive islands with trading possibilities within the Empire.

Figure 4.1 Zanzibar Court at Empire Exhibition in Wembley, 1924–25. ZNA: AV 32/104.

On the wall facing the formal display of the Sultanate was a watercolour diorama depicting clove production (Figure 4.2) in a perspective similar to that on the 1905 Zanzibar Exhibition medal. In front, batches of cloves were laid out as if drying under a *makuti* [palm-leaf] roof. The panorama included pieces of stone wall and larger painted figures on freestanding flats to create a sense of depth. The strong aroma from the cloves would have evoked the ambience of the spice island. A favourable commentator writing in *African Industries*, quoted with pride in the *Gazette*, commended the Court: 'The grouping of the practical with the artistic; the mingling of the commercial aspect with the needs of the sightseer, and the definite illustration of the many industries, all combine to impress the public'.¹⁹

Figure 4.2 Clove diorama in the Zanzibar Court at the Empire Exhibition in Wembley, 1924–25. ZNA: AV 32/106.

One of Zanzibar's unique assets was its magnificent history; therefore, the handbook accompanying the exhibits was integral to the display. This publication, written by Ingrams and others, was specifically intended not to be a guidebook, but to act as a 'pleasing souvenir ... to enable those interested to gain a correct impression of our Island Sultanate'.²⁰ This handbook sought to contextualise the image created within the Court and reclaim Zanzibar's reputation back from the music hall to assert its rightful place as the historical trading emporium of the Indian Ocean. The handbook's text did however perpetuate romantic and stereotypical images of the island to add to the allure. The displays and this handbook together represent a solution to the challenge faced by many territorial organising

committees seeking to reconcile the tensions between modernity, tradition and progress.

The handbook needs to be considered carefully, as the rationale behind the exhibit and its chapters on history and ethnography ultimately determined the organisation of the display in the new Museum in Zanzibar. In addition to the chapters by Ingrams ('Ethnology', 'History' and 'Native Industries and Occupations') there were several chapters on trade and agriculture which were broadly factual and designed to encourage commercial interest, for example highlighting the greater capacity for export in the future as a result of the recent harbour improvements. The disciplinary division determined the racial focus of each chapter – the Ethnology and Native Industries chapters discussed the indigenous population, while History referred predominately to connections with the Near Eastern Ancient world, influence from the Islamic world and the more recent interventions of Europeans and Arabs.²¹

It is useful here to examine some key aspects of Ingrams's chapters to understand further the historical narrative exhibited in the Zanzibar Museum. Selected examples indicate his tone and perspective. In the Ethnology chapter, he stated that the majority of the people were 'the Swahili ... who may be referred to as the Aborigines'.²² He clarified that this term could apply to 'all the coast Africans, but in Zanzibar it is chiefly applied to the old Slave Population and the mixed Native and Arab people'. Many of the former slaves in fact came from communities hundreds of miles into the African interior and such distinctions between ex-slaves and others were at this point significant for some members of these communities.²³ Yet for communication to the public they were grouped together. It might also have played well to the British public to suggest that since abolition slaves had been successfully assimilated into society. This is an important aspect to track into the Zanzibar Museum display – we have seen that Sheriff, Hoogt and Luhila particularly criticised the division of Swahili communities.

In the 22-page chapter on 'Ethnology', Ingrams used the lifetime and rites of passage of the individual as a framework for discussing the 'native population', a practice he adopted from anthropological guidance typical of the time.²⁴ In the 'History' chapter, Ingrams's account was not only informed by earlier British writers but, as we have seen, also by an existing historical narrative discussed widely amongst the Arab intelligentsia in Zanzibar. Critically, this discourse, as demonstrated by Glassman, had earlier origins in Swahili culture.²⁵ The model highlighted the benefits of external influences, creating a coastal culture distinctive from and more sophisticated than their mainland neighbours. While such a narrative naturally suited British

and Arab sensibilities and justified their interventions, it is critical to recognise its pre-colonial origins.²⁶

Ingrams began by introducing Zanzibar's ancient trading origins, thereby associating it with revered ancient cultures of the Near East. He traced its history to the time of the ancient Egyptians, and subsequently explained the 'invasions' of the Bantu peoples before the arrival of Arabian peoples from the Persian Gulf and the advent of Islam. He briefly described the characteristics and temperaments of the 'native tribes', and the differences between them, before commencing the detailed narrative from the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century onwards. He discussed Seyyid Said and Sultan Barghash and their dealings with the British, as well as Sir John Kirk, General Sir Lloyd Mathews and Tippu Tib: 'the great traveller, trader and ruler'.²⁷ Several pages were devoted to this latter figure, who, by the time of his death in 1905, was a popular member of Zanzibar's elite societies, respected by Arabs and the British alike.²⁸ Significantly, Ingrams does not once mention Tippu Tib's involvement in slavery, merely his supreme influence over caravans trading in the interior.

Ingrams wanted the British public to know of the global war effort and the wider imperial community. Zanzibar's contributions to the Great War effort were 'for her size, by no means negligible'. He particularly highlighted Sultan Khalifa's 'steadying influence' over the Muslim populations of East and Central Africa.²⁹ The Historical chapter concluded with positive news of future works to bring further development in education and commerce.³⁰

The Zanzibar Government was pleased with the response to the Wembley display. The Queen's visit with Dr Charlesworth on 3 July 1925 was proclaimed with great satisfaction in the *Gazette*.³¹ Charlesworth was awarded the Second Order of Brilliant Star by the Sultan.³² Several of the exhibits were returned to Zanzibar for installation in the Museum. The clove panorama was moved to the office of the Trade Commissioner for East Africa in London, the photographs to the Imperial Institute for their museum and the dhow model to the Science Museum in South Kensington (the latter object is visible in [Figure 4.3](#)). The carved 'Zanzibar' door was installed in a public building in Hull: the city had supported the Zanzibar section financially as it held 'from a commercial aspect, the interest of East Africa'.³³ This suggests that the Empire Exhibition did indeed provide an opportunity for the development of commercial relationships.

Figure 4.3 Zanzibar Court at the Empire Exhibition in Wembley, 1924–25. ZNA: AV 32/102.

Charlesworth believed the people of Zanzibar should be gratified in

taking ‘an adequate share in the carrying out of a great Imperial idea’.³⁴ Furthermore, ‘the widespread interest taken in the Court and its exhibits has had a considerable educational value, which will react beneficially to the Sultanate in its status in the public estimate, and in the knowledge gained of its products, its activities and its individuality’. Transmitting the impression of the distinctiveness of Zanzibar to the British audience was a central priority. Zanzibar’s British administrators had acted as mediators between the territory and the Empire, constructing carefully the islands’ image through objects, dioramas and text. Zanzibar’s administrators then shifted their focus to sharing this ‘great Imperial idea’ with the community in Zanzibar itself through the new Museum project.

Acquiring the Zanzibar Museum’s Collection

Throughout the Museum’s existence, the process of acquiring of objects and specimens was far from systematic. There was no coherent acquisition policy, although preferences were sporadically expressed. As in the majority of Indian museums in the nineteenth century and West African museums later in the twentieth century, the permanent collections represented local culture, mediated by European officials, rather than world collections typical of European public museums.³⁵ From its inception, the Museum was reliant upon donors from all communities to create its collection. This high level of local participation was unusual in African museums at the time and was in part the result of the presence of several elite communities for whom the Museum was one means of exerting status.³⁶ This discussion will identify some of these people involved and, where possible, discern their motivations for donating to the Museum.

It was not until 1924 that serious attention was paid to the Museum’s future arrangement and contents. In September of that year, the Resident, Sir Claud Hollis, proposed the appointment of a small Organising Committee to advise on setting up the new building ‘as a museum and educational institution’.³⁷ Chaired by Richard Crofton, Assistant Chief Secretary, the Organising Committee decided that the sections of the Museum should be ‘Public Health, Historical, Geological, Natural History and Native Industries’.³⁸ These sections married the perceived educational needs of the Protectorate with more traditional museum topics – a combination that is unique in the history of colonial museums in the 1920s. Such themes were more typical of the educational missions of museums established after the Second World War, according to MacKenzie’s phases.³⁹ Two of these areas – natural history and public health – had not formed part of the Wembley display, but were represented in the museum in the Public

Health office. Although material had been collected for Wembley, additional objects for the Historical and Native Industries section were most urgently needed.

The officers, later referred to as ‘keepers’, selected to take responsibility for each section were the Senior Medical Officer for Health, the Economic Biologist, the Director of Agriculture, the Director of Education and Ingrams, Hollis’s Private Secretary, for the Historical section. Each was allocated a sum for acquisition (all Rs. 800, apart from Agriculture – which received Rs. 1300).

Only scant references to Spurrier’s collecting exist, and unfortunately few details of the provenance of objects were recorded, a challenge Nicol Smith also encountered when creating her catalogue in the 1930s. An undated letter from Richard Crofton to Nicol Smith, evidently in response to a request for information about the collection’s formation, indicates Ingrams’s authority over the historical interpretation. When discussing a chair that had not been transferred to the Museum, Crofton remarked, ‘Ingrams also would have been on to it if it was historically interesting’.⁴⁰

In November 1924, the Organising Committee authorised Spurrier to advertise the Museum’s willingness to accept loans or gifts.⁴¹ A fictionalised account of the frenzy of local contributions is given by Evelyn Waugh in *Black Mischief* when the Emperor of Azania decides to create a museum: ‘Word went round that there was a market for objects of interest at the Ministry of Modernization and the work of the office was completely paralysed by the hawkers of all races who assembled in and around it’.⁴² Waugh may have discussed the creation of the Zanzibar Museum’s collection in the days he spent with Spurrier in 1929. Experience from the 1905 Exhibition showed a general willingness to exhibit and be represented. Certainly, growth of the collections outweighed expectation; additional funds had to be allocated for showcases to accommodate artefacts deemed worthy of display.⁴³

Through donations from the Sultan, the British Resident and the public as well as specially commissioned models, a sufficient collection was amassed for the Museum’s inauguration. Sultan Khalifa, who had endorsed the Museum project from the start, was an enthusiastic loaner and donor. For the opening, opulent objects relating to his illustrious ancestors were installed, including a pair of ceremonial saddles used at the time of Seyyid Hamud bin Muhammad (rd. 1896–1902, [Figure 4.4](#)).⁴⁴ Hollis offered objects of great significance to Zanzibar from the British Residency, including the drums and horns of the Mwinyi Mkuu.⁴⁵ The Sultan continued to move pieces from his personal collection to the Museum, including valuable metal-works and the seal of Imam Ahmed, the founder of the

al-Busaidi dynasty, who died in 1783. Hollis continued to donate from his own collection and began moving historical documents, then inadequately stored in the Residency, to the Museum. Manuscripts would form part of the foundation collection of the Archives (see [Chapter 6](#)).

The collections grew rapidly in the early years. In August 1926, Ingrams urged that ‘those who wish to keep in touch with the progress of the Museum should visit at least once a week’.⁴⁶ Objects continued to pour in for the Native Industries section, examples including iron-work, wood-work and pottery. It is clear, from the *Gazette* and Nicol Smith’s catalogue and reports, that members of the European, Arab and Indian communities were regular donors to the Museum, offering articles of artistic merit, everyday objects from homes and pieces found on excursions around the island.⁴⁷ Occasionally these were highly significant, such as the tenth-century beads discovered by J. P. Jones, the Provincial Commissioner, and his wife on a beach in Pemba in 1938.⁴⁸ Members of Zanzibar’s other communities also contributed to the collections: on his travels around the Protectorate, Hollis was regularly given objects discovered by rural and village dwellers intended for the Museum.⁴⁹ Colonial officers within the wider East Africa region were also aware of the Museum’s importance and sent pieces to it.⁵⁰

Figure 4.4 ‘The Royal Section’. BM: Af,B19.25

Only rarely were objects refused. Crofton later remarked that the Museum was conceived at a fortunate time when ‘there was still much valuable material scattered about in public offices and also in private hands which, without this incentive, might easily have been lost to posterity’.⁵¹ An officer in Pemba suggested that Spurrier come to the smaller island to acquire curios as ‘Old things continue to disappear’.⁵² Muhammed Abdulrahman judiciously enhanced the collections by bringing ceramic pottery sherds of celadon and Persian origin from Kilwa Kisiwani on the Tanganyikan mainland for the pre-Omani section. Such objects gave material evidence of the narrative he taught in Zanzibar’s schools of the great city-states reportedly created by Persian immigrants.⁵³ Export merchants could be useful sources of material as they saw this as an opportunity to present their wares. With few funds for acquisitions, curio merchants were vital sources, but such items were popular so Spurrier needed to forge good relations with them. The medal created for the porters for the Emin Pasha Expedition was an unexpected treasure discovered in a curio shop in September 1933. An employee of Smith Mackenzie Company purchased it but Crofton had a copy made for the Museum.⁵⁴ The attendants in the Museum both collected specimens and arranged for

objects to come to the Museum from the wider population, fulfilling an essential mediating role.⁵⁵

Occasionally, evidence sheds light on the motivations of the donors. Hassan Ahmed of the Chaani Dispensary revealed his sentiments in a letter to Spurrier: 'I am much proud for having seen my name in the Zanzibar Museum. It shows me that as the fine remembrance of mine, even I die but the name will remain in the bet-el-aman [sic] for ever'.⁵⁶ This is a rare insight into the meaning of the Museum, and it reinforces the impression that this individual considered it a site of memorialisation as befitting its original name.

Artefacts also arrived from colonial officials in Britain with connections to Zanzibar, as either donations or bequests in wills. Repatriating objects that had been taken to England by former administrators was a central part of the Museum's role.⁵⁷ For example, Robert Lyne sent copies of Lloyd Mathews' letters when he had completed his book on the formidable late nineteenth-century First Minister.⁵⁸ In 1926, Major F. B. Pearce, the former Resident and historian of Zanzibar, bequeathed notable artefacts in his will: an Arab sword and scabbard, which had belonged to Seyyid Said, and an Arab shield of rhinoceros hide.⁵⁹

There were likely to be multiple motivations behind such donations from overseas. Those with a conscience for Zanzibar's history felt such objects *should* be returned. The objects' value could therefore be recouped in the form of philanthropic well-being. There were alternatives. The former British Agent, Basil Cave, and several others, donated their collections to the British Museum and other institutions in Britain rather than to Zanzibar; Pearce donated ceramics to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Once officers with a connection to the island had died, sentimental attachment was severed, and the objects became a commodity for their heirs, who might sell them in the European market.

The case of Lady Cave's collection merits particular attention. As the sister of Lloyd Mathews and sister-in-law of Basil Cave, she possessed a large number of Zanzibar artefacts in her collection in London. She sent several of Mathews's personal items to the Museum for its opening, including his epaulettes, aiguillettes and swords. Objects that represented historical events inherited from Mathews were also donated by Lady Cave, such as the drum and flag seized at the fall of Witu and two of Tippu Tib's swords.⁶⁰

On the death of her husband, in 1928, Lady Cave put up the whole collection for auction.⁶¹ Her piece of most significance to Zanzibar, 'the famous rice bowl' of the Mwinyi Mkuu (Figure 4.5), was too valuable to donate free of charge but she withheld it from the auction

to give the Zanzibar Museum an opportunity to buy it.⁶² This large Chinese bowl was the personal vessel from which the Mwinyi Mkuu rulers had reportedly eaten rice for four centuries. Mathews acquired the rice bowl after the dynasty died out in the 1870s. Letters in the archive to Spurrier indicate the great determination of the Zanzibar Government to bring the bowl back to Zanzibar.⁶³ Hollis urgently instructed Spurrier, who was in England at the time, to inspect the pieces to see what could be bought for the Museum: 'We are particularly anxious to secure the China Bowl out of which the Mwinyi Mkuu are said to have eaten their rice for 400 years'.⁶⁴ The Museum's funds were limited but they succeeded in purchasing the bowl for £40, considered cheap by the Museum Committee, whose members were delighted about the 'splendid acquisition'.⁶⁵ The bowl arrived in Zanzibar and was on display by October 1928.⁶⁶

The Museum was only able to afford the large sum for the bowl thanks to a donation of £50 from Rudolph Said-Ruete.⁶⁷ He was the son of Emily Ruete, better known as Seyyida Salme and daughter of Seyyid Said, whose connection to Zanzibar was by that time severed, following her notorious elopement in 1866. Said-Ruete used the Zanzibar Museum as a forum to rehabilitate his mother's reputation on the island. The case devoted to the personal objects of Seyyida Salme included a copy of her memoirs, the programme to a concert she attended in Aden on her journey to Europe after her elopement and later her veil.⁶⁸ One record also suggests that the Mwinyi Mkuu's bowl was relocated alongside these objects, the label indicating the purchase supported by the donor. In this display, therefore, the bowl's significance was firmly attached to its benefactor and Said-Ruete's desire to memorialise his mother, rather than the bowl's primary significance in Zanzibar's Swahili population.

Figure 4.5 Mwinyi Mkuu's rice bowl in the House of Wonders, Zanzibar National Museum.

From the correspondence, it is clear that the Museum Committee members felt they were fulfilling their duty in bringing the bowl back to Zanzibar. As trustees of Zanzibar's history, they sought to retrieve objects obtained by their predecessors before such treasures disappeared into the museums, auctions houses or stately homes of Great Britain, divorced from their historical context and significance. There was no suggestion, though, that they might be returned to the Wahadimu people. The Museum's perceived function was to preserve and protect such objects, even from their original owners.

This significant purchase was an isolated case. The Museum's budget for object acquisition was minimal. In 1939, for example, only £10 was available.⁶⁹ With such limitations, Nicol Smith attempted to be strategic and fill the gaps she perceived in the collections. Many of

her purchases expanded the range of objects used locally in daily life, mainly from sellers in the market.⁷⁰ This reflects both her interest in anthropology and the low cost of such items. Unlike the new museum in Tanganyika, where a call for objects was sent to all the District Commissioners to preserve local artefacts before they ceased to be used, no such public appeal of this kind appears to have been made.⁷¹ Storage was limited and Nicol Smith may have wished to be more discriminating in acquisitions.

Occasionally the Museum acquired new pieces by local artists. One particularly fine sculpture of a bird and a crab by Njira bin Hamisi, an inhabitant of Zanzibar Town, was purchased in 1941. Nicol Smith and her fellow Europeans were highly impressed by the ‘vital motion of the scene’ with the crab depicted grabbing the bird’s leg and the bird pecking the crab.⁷² She believed the piece demonstrated the ‘genius of a real artist’ and ‘shows what can come even from untaught Africans’.⁷³ Its realism countered the fixed British notion of ‘African art’. It was also around this time that Nicol Smith proposed the formation of the Zanzibar Arts and Crafts Society, with the intention of encouraging local artists and displaying their work in the Annexe. Unfortunately, she clashed with the Indian community members who were keen to support the venture, as she wanted to reserve the right to judge the work.⁷⁴ After the split, the Indian community formed the Society, which went on to become active in the 1940s, as will be discussed further in [Chapter 5](#). It was ultimately a loss to the Museum.

Members of communities beyond the town also donated archaeological discoveries, of which coins were the most common. Not only were they some of the oldest remnants of the early Indian Ocean trade but they were also seen as a source of income from the Government who occasionally offered rewards for their donation. One particular hoard sparked controversy, as the British intermediary in the donation kept some coins and challenged the Museum Committee’s claim that they were Government property.⁷⁵ The legal powers of the Museum to claim and protect artefacts were still unregulated, allowing such objects to be kept or sold by individuals.

Although this incident prompted many questions and generated much correspondence, no action was taken to inscribe the protection of artefacts into law. Concern over the loss of historical property was aroused sporadically, such as the legality of the export of Zanzibar doors and Arab chests. One of the greatest salvages of the period was the oldest dated Zanzibar door, recovered from a house demolished in 1941.⁷⁶ The inscription read ‘Success is from God and Victory is near’ with the date AH 1112 (CE 1694).⁷⁷ The aperture around the existing door to the Museum was enlarged in order to insert this historic door in its place. It remains the oldest known dated door on the island. The

relocation of historic doors to new buildings was a common practice in Zanzibar and East Africa. The Museum building therefore itself became a part of the collection and strengthened its status as a ‘house’ of culture. In the absence of funding for the preservation of ruins, gradually pieces were moved to the Museum, a practice typical of archaeological ethics of the time, including stone panels, woodwork on doors and window frames.⁷⁸ This form of ‘preservation’, though, was a compromise in the absence of a proper historic monuments policy.

Not all objects found their way to the Museum. Hans Koritschoner, who at that time was assisting the Tanganyika Secretary of Native Affairs, had a collection of 260 cases of objects from Pemba which were ‘kept by the natives in great secrecy and I obtained them under the promise of greatest secrecy’.⁷⁹ He therefore did not want to display them locally and sought Nicol Smith’s advice in negotiating with museums in England to whom he hoped to sell the collection. Whether cultural sensitivity or financial gain was the stronger motive, significant collections of indigenous cultures were amassed in metropolitan museums.

Researching the Museum’s Collection

While Spurrier oversaw the acquisition of hundreds of objects, the records he maintained were imprecise and incomplete. In the absence of a formal catalogue, it is likely that any information on provenance was retained by Spurrier and the staff retained by memory – confirmed by Crofton’s letter to Nicol Smith when referring to information gleaned verbally from Spurrier.⁸⁰ Nicol Smith made the creation of a catalogue her priority soon after her arrival in 1936, and she finally finished the task in 1941. This card index still remains in the House of Wonders, where the collection is now housed, and has formed the basis of the current computerised catalogue. The objects were organised into thematic reference sections: art, history, native industries, geology and natural history, and were designed to be cross-referenced by registration number. In most cases, the information is not extensive but where possible Nicol Smith indicated the provenance of the objects.

Members of the community were essential in research into the collection. Crofton’s letter also highlights the role of local staff as informers. When recalling the collections of Residents Pearce and Hollis he explained that they usually sought information from ‘their native staff or other sources’.⁸¹ Nicol Smith, too, developed a network of local supporters. For example, when seeking information about the Arab silver-work, Chinese porcelain, copper-work from the Persian

Gulf and the Orders of Zanzibar, she was assisted by ‘various Arab gentlemen who kindly gave their time to inform her of the provenance and function of the specimens’.⁸² Two decades later, in 1957, Thompson encouraged adding Arab members to the Committee for this reason.⁸³ In 1937 Nicol Smith received information about coins she had sent to Cambridge to be identified by Louis Clarke. She wrote an off-hand but revealing response: ‘Such a treat to have exact information; there’s such an amount of waffle here’.⁸⁴ Her research locally evidently produced vague information, much of which she deemed superfluous when trying to create a concise catalogue. For example, she wished to find clarification of the age of the Mwinyi Mkuu’s rice bowl. It was undoubtedly was one of the ‘star’ objects in the collection and Nicol Smith wanted confirmation of its date, previously believed to be 400 years old. An expert she consulted in the Victoria and Albert Museum identified it ‘as of the eighteenth century or later’.⁸⁵ There is evidence that Seyyid Said and his successor Seyyid Majid bestowed gifts upon Mwinyi Mkuu Mohammed in exchange for levies.⁸⁶ This particular bowl may have been such a bestowal.⁸⁷ Many of the objects warrant further investigation into their provenance; the extensive detail revealed by the story of the Mwinyi Mkuu’s regalia hints at the wealth of undiscovered stories contained within the Museum’s collection.

The Space for Exhibition

The Museum building, in spite of the remarkable architectural design, was not a practical space in which to fit exhibits. The ground floor was intended, as we have seen in [Chapter Two](#), to be sparsely filled to give room for lectures. Following the redesign and removal of the second floor, the ground floor became the principal area for displays. Circular spaces are notoriously inappropriate for storing books and displaying exhibits.⁸⁸ The overall hexagonal design severely limited the possibilities. It will be recalled that the opening of the Museum was delayed due to the difficulties in creating cases suitable for the space.⁸⁹

The hitherto unknown series of photographs from 1926 to 1927, found in the British Museum photographic collection, are the earliest known photographs of the Zanzibar Museum’s displays. (Detailed analysis of these photographs can be found in [Appendix 2](#)). For the first time we can examine the displays in detail, alongside exhibits described in the archival documents and guidebooks (see [Figure 4.6](#)). It is possible to admire the variety of cases made by the skilled Indian carpenter, Narsingh Damji.⁹⁰ It should be noted that in each image, the case at the forefront was part of the Historical section, which

extended into the hexagonal central space. Such an arrangement creates some curious alignments, for example the ostentatious Arab jewellery alongside the Public Health exhibits. Such photographic evidence is vital in demonstrating the apparent lack of coherence in the display. While the handbook implies a grand historical narrative, visitors in fact had much more freedom to wander, constructing their own interpretations.

Combined with the written evidence and further photographs, we can track changes in the display with the expansion of the Museum. As soon as she arrived, Nicol Smith refreshed the historical and natural history displays. Throughout, she attempted to make the displays in both Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam more visually engaging. More specifically, ‘each exhibit ... attempts in the first instance to attract the eye and in the second to enable the brain easily to assimilate its content’.⁹¹ She replaced the background fabric and expanded the use of kiSwahili. Noticeboards were placed for the first time outside the two museum buildings in English, Arabic, kiSwahili and Gujarati.⁹² The following discussion of the displays examines the Historical section in detail and the changes in the exhibits where possible.

Figure 4.6 Schematic plan of sections based on the 1926–27 photographs.

Exhibiting and Memorialising Zanzibar: the Historical Section

Ingrams’s ‘Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section’ of 1927 gave detailed descriptions of the displays in the Historical section, the structure of which directly corresponded to the Wembley handbook, *Zanzibar: An Account of its People, Industries and History*. The photographic evidence allows the narrative of the booklet to be related to specific exhibits, and thus we can examine how coherence was attempted within this challenging physical space. What is clear is the density of material and the quantity of written information. It should be recalled that these displays were erected by amateur curators with the support of some educationalists (such as Hendry and Aders); their display strategies therefore must be carefully contextualised, considering both the experience and intentions of the progenitors and the financial resources available at the time.

In selecting material to represent Zanzibar’s long history, the availability of objects from each chronological period varied widely. [Figure 4.7](#) shows the combination of table cases and vertical displays of photographs with two cases against the piers on either side providing space for larger materials. The case towards the centre of

the room contained the Ethnological display, recognisable immediately by the skulls.

The Museum's interpretation of pre-Omani history, with its emphasis upon overseas influence from ancient times, perpetuated the accepted paradigm of Zanzibar. This section, displayed on a series of freestanding cases, relied upon photographs, maps, drawings and text in the absence of objects from this period. Through these images, Ingrams sought to stress the influences from the great civilisations of antiquity, including the Phoenicians, the Sumerians, the Greeks and the Assyrians, on the development of Swahili culture. The motifs on Zanzibar doors – clearly visible in [Figure 4.7](#) – were interpreted as having Assyrian, Egyptian and Arab origins. Thus the design of one of the most recognisable and typically Swahili forms of art – which reached its apogee in the nineteenth century when patrons from all communities commissioned new doors, and local styles were fused with those from India and Oman – was here interpreted through possible connections to these ancient civilisations.⁹³ This presence of contemporary material with the ancient story represents an attempt to place the current culture in historical context. Yet the resulting effect underplays local agency in adapting and absorbing these diverse cultural influences.

Figure 4.7 'Historical and Ethnological Section'. BM: Af,B19.29.

Even less material was available to illustrate the first centuries of the Common Era. Ingrams described the period in the handbook as 'the darkest age in the history of the East Coast' when 'the western world [was] too occupied with its own troubles to take notice of Africa, but the Bantu invasion was taking place and well armed savages were replacing the Stone Age negro on the East Coast'.⁹⁴ This was followed by a section discussing the gradual conversion of local peoples to Islam, the time when 'the Zanzibaris were converted from animism and idolatry to Islam', illustrated by a chart.⁹⁵

A small section investigated 'the Origins of the Native Tribes', where Ingrams described the 'natives' as being mainly fisherfolk and agriculturalists, but originally of 'forest type'. This was justified using a photograph of a contemporary rectangular house, a style of building which was characteristic of forest people – which appears to be illustrated on one of two stands in the display. The local people were described as being 'of mixed African and Asiatic origin' who claimed descent on the African side from the Wasegeju and Wadigo, and Persians as their Asiatic forefathers.⁹⁶ The next set of photographs in the vertical cases referred to the period of the 'Zenj empire', the era which began following the arrival of Persian or 'Shirazi' immigrants, dated to CE 965 by Ingrams. In the chronological narrative of the

handbook, Ingrams turned his attention to visitors from the Indian Ocean and Far East, links that were easily illustrated through archaeological material in table cases. Local finds on Zanzibar and Pemba of Chinese coins and ceramic ware, from the Ming period onwards, included a celadon dish reportedly over 800 years old).⁹⁷ Other archaeological material including beads, glass and pottery fragments were placed in the table cases, while larger stone pieces removed from mosques, including a colonnette from the oldest dated mosque at Kizimkazi (CE 1107, 500 AH) were placed against the wall and the side cases. The emphasis upon the 'Zenj empire' in history corresponded with the popular belief that the Swahili city-states were created by an alien people from Shiraz in Persia. 'Shirazi' ancestry was claimed by many indigenous people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in part to counter Arab domination.⁹⁸

Figure 4.8 'The Native Industries Section'. BM: Af,B19.28.

Figure 4.9 Central case containing large ceramics and brass containers. BM: Af,B19.31.

Ingrams's narrative then describes a section on the local dynasties of Pemba and Zanzibar, which contained small items, such as deeds, letters and photographs. It is possible that this was the case in front of the Native Industries section (Figure 4.8). The items of greatest local historical interest, the Mwinyi Mkuu's horns and drums, were positioned prominently. One horn and drum stood against the piers between the Historical and Native Industries section, with the second to the other side of this section. This placement allows several inferences to be made. Although the central zone was an extension of the Historical section, this placement, on open display, gave these objects of great spiritual and political significance an indefinite place between the historical and local industries. The Mwinyi Mkuu's rice bowl, deemed of artistic as well as socio-political value, was given pride of place in the central hexagonal case section (Figure 4.9). This too was technically part of the Historical section and included other large ceramic vessels, which were diplomatic gifts or acquisitions by Sultan Barghash in particular – but their central placement determined by type of material rather than historical period was clearly designed to have a visual rather than narrative impact. Only a visitor determined to read the many labels would have made the connection between the rice bowl and the other regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu.⁹⁹

Unfortunately, Ingrams did not provide much further commentary for the 'History of Modern Zanzibar' section: 'These modern periods need no guide to piece them together, the historical material being plentiful and easily accessible to the student'.¹⁰⁰ He indicated that

from the period of Seyyid Said onwards, each Sultan was dealt with in sequence, alongside photographs documents and ‘objects of personal or political application to the monarch concerned’.¹⁰¹ Tippu Tib ‘the great Zanzibari explorer’ had a separate section, while the activities of Kirk, Mathews and other Europeans associated with Zanzibar were included under the appropriate reign. The display of portraits on the screen ([Figure 4.4](#)), flanked by flags and the Sultan’s saddles, provided a means of celebrating the Sultanate and the al-Busaidi dynasty.

A highly significant object revealed in these photographs is the inclusion of a set of slave stocks, which may have come from Pemba – politically charged objects displayed at ground level, resting on the bases of the photograph stands ([Figure 4.7](#)).¹⁰² The legacy of slavery and the memory of slave history, as discussed in [Chapter 1](#), was an extremely delicate issue in Zanzibar. While the British maintained pride in the humanitarian mission of abolition, the Arab community, with whom they purported to share power, blamed the end of slavery for their economic predicament. Former slaves were grouped by the British administration as part of the ‘African’ community, but many indigenous Swahili islanders sought to differentiate themselves. For these reasons, the exhibition of stocks must have been debated, but they are significantly absent from the various guidebooks. The particular location of their original display – at foot level – allowed for an ambiguous path to be trodden. In the absence of documentation, one can only speculate as to the justification. It might have been decided that the placement of the stocks at foot level was historically accurate, but also meant they could easily be ignored, or highlighted by a guide as necessary. Such an uneasy compromise was typical of the British approach to dealing with this inflammatory issue.

The stocks may have been one of the contentious objects alluded to in 1957, at a time of increasing political tension between political representatives of Arabs, descended from slave-owners, and of the Afro-Shirazi Party, who sought to represent the Swahili majority, former slaves and more recent immigrants from the mainland. Thompson, the then archivist-curator, learned that ‘the opinion has been expressed in Arab circles that the Museum, through its exhibits relating to the slave trade, is a subtle political weapon to keep African and Arab apart and so consolidate the position of the European’.¹⁰³ The presence of material relating to slavery in this case was interpreted by Arab visitors as a sly method of ‘divide and rule’. This will be discussed further in [Chapter 6](#). Three years later, in August 1962, as the political situation intensified still further, the Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare) requested ‘during these days of party tension, that no pictures should be on show which mind tend to

exacerbate racial feelings'.¹⁰⁴ Some months later (following Thompson's departure), the ultimate fate of the stocks is revealed:

Two pieces of wood at Museum ... with holes in them. Were used for fastening legs of slaves (slave fork). Too big to be put in any store, so kept outside at entrance of office rather at a conspicuous position. Would like to destroy them. Wood is not good and has holes, have no cash value. Shall split and dump them into the sea.¹⁰⁵

This action was approved the following month. Perhaps they had been moved from display to outside the curator's office in 1957. It should not surprise us that objects of such potency, which made tangible individual suffering and simultaneously represented the atrocities of the slave trade, were deemed too sensitive for display in the 1960s. Its destruction, however, is a significant loss to Zanzibar where few genuine remnants of the island's slave history and heritage remain.¹⁰⁶

Zanzibar's slave history was alluded to further when the Historical section was expanded in 1930, permitted by the removal of the Public Health and Natural History sections to the new Annexe. This expansion enabled further exhibits from the nineteenth century, the perceived zenith of Zanzibar's history. With particular reference to slavery, the Museum responded to the local context by recognising abolition in a positive light. The focus upon the explorers, the work of 'enlightened' sultans who signed the important treaties and the role of Sir John Kirk, the British Consul who negotiated the 1873 treaty with Sultan Barghash, bypassed controversy. Neither the Museum displays nor its handbooks embarked upon a more rigorous examination of the tense machinations between the British and the Arab rulers in the nineteenth century and the delay over abolition. Nor did they dwell upon slavery as a source of Zanzibar's nineteenth-century prosperity. This ambiguous representation of slavery typified the Zanzibar Government's approach to the issue.

The Explorers' exhibit enabled the Museum to expand and celebrate the intervention of the British in Zanzibar and to depict the island as integral to the imperial mission (Figure 4.10). These explorers were mythologized in Britain and in East Africa.¹⁰⁷ Connections with them, through buildings, objects and letters, were eagerly sought by Zanzibar's European residents. The Museum took a similarly fanatical view – amassing objects with even slightly or spurious connections. The most prized exhibit was Livingstone's medicine chest, which he and Kirk used on the 1858 Zambesi Expedition (Figure 4.11).¹⁰⁸ Waugh noted that this contained 'practically no quinine, but an enormous variety of pharmaceutically valueless poisons'.¹⁰⁹ The medals awarded to followers of Livingstone and Stanley¹¹⁰ and the 'Nominal Roll of the Porters of Stanley's Expedition to relieve Livingstone', donated by Smith, Mackenzie and

Co, were the sole references to the many indigenous assistants who enabled these explorations.¹¹¹

The prominence of this exhibit held several meanings for the European community. The history of the explorers was intertwined with the abolition movement, in both a positive and negative sense. Livingstone was mythologised as a great campaigner for abolition and intimately involved in the establishment of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa. On the other hand, Stanley had controversially used slaves during his exploration, and had had a famous disagreement with Tippu Tib over portage for his expedition.¹¹² The British remembered Tippu Tib himself not as a cruel slave-dealer but as a congenial figure of Zanzibar society, who 'never lost his attraction for the Europeans'.¹¹³

Figure 4.10 Interior of the Zanzibar Museum, undated. Detail of Explorers' Section, ZNA: AV32/48

Figure 4.11 David Livingstone's medicine chest in the House of Wonders Museum, Zanzibar National Museum.

Figure 4.12 The Lower West Bay: Kirk memorial display, 1933. National Library of Scotland, Sir John Kirk papers, Acc 9942/47.

Further material from the nineteenth century was installed in the lower west bay: 'many relics, pictorial and other, of old-time Zanzibar' suggested an influx of donations, including panoramas of the town and images of sea-faring activity. Other key 'protagonists in Zanzibar's history', including Sultan Barghash, the Mwinyi Mkuu, Tippu Tib, Sir John Kirk and Sir Lloyd Mathews, were illustrated in detail.¹¹⁴ The most important material objects in this section were a chest brought by Seyyid Said and the *viti vya enzi* – the chairs of power, as seen in the Rogers collection in [Chapter 1](#). In their original settings in the homes of Swahili leaders and elders along the coast, these chairs were designated for use by those of high status.¹¹⁵ [Figure 4.12](#) is a photograph of this section from the Sir John Kirk collection in Scotland, likely to have been taken at the time of the rearrangement of this display erected to celebrate the centenary of Kirk's birth in 1932. At this time a new portrait of Kirk was unveiled and the two table cases temporarily displayed further details about him.¹¹⁶ The arrangement underpinned the historical narrative proposed by the Museum of the nineteenth-century history of Zanzibar: Sultan Barghash is central, and is supported on either side by Sir Lloyd Mathews and Sir John Kirk.

These visual and textual sources allow us to see how the Historical section was altered and new material incorporated into the display.

Such shifts allowed changes in emphasis, for example the expanded role of European protagonists in Zanzibar's history. Furthermore, the Museum was also a space for memorialisation, which could take different forms. Not only was the building a memorial in itself, with an annual service on Armistice Day, but it was also located next to the Mathews Memorial where, intermittently until the 1950s, a wreath was laid on the day of his death. In effect the entire Historical section of the Museum acted as a memorial to the Zanzibar of days gone by. As statues were not deemed appropriate in a Muslim country, the Museum became the location for such tributes. As we have seen, in 1932, a memorial exhibition was displayed about Sir John Kirk, at the instigation of the imperial historian Sir Reginald Coupland after insufficient funds were raised for a memorial in stone.¹¹⁷

Local Productions: The Native Industries and Agricultural Sections

The Historical section was dominated by the story of the rulers rather than the ruled, typical of museums worldwide at this time. Other than the brief descriptions of the 'origins of Native tribes' in the Historical section, Zanzibar's Swahili communities were principally represented in the Native Industries section. The 1933 *Short Guide to the Zanzibar Museum* provides a sufficient summary of the former section to be able to identify the different cases in the photographs, which were 'organised by handicraft' (Figure 4.9). Almost all these objects feature in the proposed list of exhibits made by Hendry in 1924. Although the Native Industries section exhibited the majority of the ethnographic material in the Museum's collection, Ingrams explained in the 1927 guide that the display was not an attempt to examine aspects of the life of the people: this 'can only be studied in books', and he directed visitors towards his various writings.¹¹⁸ The accompanying pamphlets give few explanations of the display – the arrangement by handicraft seems to have been deemed self-explanatory. Nicol Smith added to these and improved the labels but gave no more details of the changes. Figure 4.9 reveals details of objects unrecorded elsewhere. It is clear from the image of the section in its first incarnation that it contained a greater number of larger objects and fewer text-heavy labels than the Historical section. Under each heading, such as 'wood work', were a variety of object types – many of which offer useful ethnographic insights, such as patterned coconut graters and the typically Swahili high wooden sandals.

One rationale behind the display is revealed by Ingrams, who believed that 'the art of the Swahili' should 'be studied not in picture

galleries but on his clothes and household furniture'. He explained that the caps (not visible in the photograph), spoons and wood-work on display showed examples of the patterns with which man 'throughout the world delights to ornament his utensils are often borrowed direct from nature'.¹¹⁹ No textiles are visible in the photographs of this section – and the popular kanga cloths worn locally (although produced in India) were not included. As we have seen, the images of carved doors were exhibited in the Historical section in relation to overseas influence rather than a form of contemporary local art.

The divergent purpose of the displays illustrates well the inchoate responsibilities that the Protectorate Government felt towards local culture. The aim of displaying and preserving examples of local artisanal practice was in part a project of salvage ethnography, a theme that resonated across the colonial world at this time.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the display of magic charms and objects associated with witchcraft – which Ingrams had studied in some detail – played a dual function: to satisfy the curiosity of the European visitor and to provide information for local people, in the hope that 'an understanding of it will help, with patience and sympathy, to its elimination as education progresses'.¹²¹ Apparent contradictions between eliminating some practices and preserving others are typical of the paternalistic guiding hand of the British – civilising and yet preserving others at the expense of modernisation.

Objects from the varied communities in Zanzibar were grouped together in the Native Industries displays at this time. Ingrams's descriptions in the pamphlets of the 'tribes' are also problematic and testify to the complexities of social identity in colonial Zanzibar. While a proposed anthropological survey of the 1930s described the 'relative homogeneity of native life', Ingrams in his writings clearly identified the differences between the inhabitants of Pemba, Tumbatu and Unguja.¹²² It should be recalled that members of these communities themselves debated, claimed and rejected such identities. Many islanders chose to describe themselves as Shirazi, Wahadimu, Wapemba and Watumbatu on their census returns and rejected the term 'Swahili', as it increasingly became associated with mainland immigrants and former slaves.¹²³ One result of the violence and division of the post-independence period has been the development of a cohesive Swahili identity in Zanzibar, although attributing divisions solely to colonial rule misrepresents the agency of Zanzibar's population in staking their claims to particular group identities in the interwar period.¹²⁴

As a point of comparison, a more systematic ethnographic collection was planned by Nicol Smith in Dar es Salaam in 1939 so

that ‘the tribes in Tanganyika’ could be exhibited separately, as pioneered in the CMAE, rather than by handicraft. In this format, ‘a tribesman would at once see the material possessions of his tribe as a whole and be able to appreciate at a glance that aspect of his tribal history which will soon be a past phase’.¹²⁵ At the time of the King George V Museum’s opening, there were not yet sufficient numbers of objects collected to represent each tribe separately and objects from different groups were therefore integrated together and compared by type. Nicol Smith was optimistic that, in time, the collections would expand sufficiently to reorganise the display on the Cambridge model. It is notable that this was not attempted in Zanzibar with the objects organised by material, though the separation of the majority of the ‘Native’ objects from Historical section represented one form of ethnic division.

Figure 4.13 ‘The Agricultural Section’. BM: Af,B19.26.

As a rule, the Museum focused upon Zanzibar’s history, culture and environment. The only area in which history beyond the East African region was addressed was in a display set up by Ingrams in 1926 on the Ethnology, or ‘the Ascent of Man’ as he called it.¹²⁶ This is the case visible in [Figure 4.7](#). Whilst the Museum ‘is devoted to Zanzibar’, Ingrams explained, ‘it is important to realise the progress of man, particularly in the neighbouring continent, before he came to these Islands’.¹²⁷ A series of stone-age tools from the African continent, including West Africa, Egypt and Algeria, donated by the eminent anthropologist and prolific donors to museums, Prof C. G. Seligman, were displayed alongside fossils from Zanzibar.¹²⁸

The Agricultural section formed a modernising counterpart to the Historical and Native Industries sections. It was the most economically driven section in the Museum and both a showcase of Zanzibar’s produce for important visitors to the island and a tool to educate rural communities about developments and possibilities within agriculture. Miss E. J. Welsford conceived and organised the opening display and wrote the accompanying pamphlet when acting as Government Mycologist in the 1920s.¹²⁹ Her principal duties in this role were to investigate diseases that affected the clove and coconut trees – the results of which were displayed on one of the freestanding cases.

As is clear from [Figure 4.13](#), there were large quantities of specimens in glass jars, including oil, vanillin, coir rope and matting, coconut oil and soap. Yusufali Esmailjee Jivanjee, a local merchant, provided examples of their locally produced soap.¹³⁰ Most significant of the revelations from this photo is that these cases were also titled in kiSwahili. ‘Economic plants’ is written in rudimentary kiSwahili, in a

phrase which roughly translates as ‘Valuable trees other than clove trees and coconut palms’.¹³¹ The educational objective, then, was to raise local awareness about which products were potentially lucrative and how to prevent disease. The massed shelves of glass jars add a scientific quality to the display without, perhaps, providing much practical guidance.

Exhibits from this section were regularly borrowed, for example, by the Clove Growers Association, for agricultural exhibitions in Zanzibar and on the East African coast.¹³² The regularity of temporary agricultural exhibitions both on Zanzibar and in Tanganyika testifies to the enduring belief in their ability to promote economic developments.

Ephemeral Displays: the First Annexe and Temporary Exhibitions

Hitherto unrecognised in the history of the Zanzibar Museum was a temporary annexe established in response to the rapid growth of the collection in its first years of existence. A document hidden in a mislabelled file in the Zanzibar Archives reveals the location and contents of the enlightening and unusual display. Its thematic arrangement attempted to place Zanzibari objects in a broader global context. From the tantalisingly sparse records about this display, it appears that Ingrams curated the exhibit. Whereas in the main Museum he relied upon the handbook and labels to describe foreign influences in Zanzibar, in this temporary annexe he used the objects, both historical and modern, to explain the global connections.

The temporary annexe building was known as the Old Indian Gaol, and had been built around 1896 by General Mathews to house ‘better class convicts, including Europeans and Indians’.¹³³ After the erection of the permanent Museum Annexe in 1930, this building became the Women’s Clinic.¹³⁴ This transformation from gaol, to museum to clinic, activities requiring quite different buildings, was not unusual in Zanzibar Town at this time when the Public Works Department often renovated buildings to save space and cost. The temporary annexe was opened on 6 January 1927 by the Sultan in an informal opening, attended only by the Committee, the Sultan and his son, and members of the press.¹³⁵

Outside the building was placed Zanzibar’s first fire engine, which may possibly be the same one in the Museum collection today. Just inside the building, the first exhibit was an adjunct to the Agricultural display in the main Museum and included various ploughs, hoes and other agricultural tools, placing modern agriculture in historical

context. A placard in kiSwahili was placed above the display explaining the advantage of the modern implements. This is another early example of kiSwahili labels in the Museum.¹³⁶

Each of the former cells of the gaol was devoted to a different theme. Cells, although likely to be limited in light, had the advantage of much wall space, notably lacking in Sinclair's grand and impractical design. The first cell contained a military exhibit, which illustrated 'the whole development of arms and armour and their use in East Africa and those parts of the Near East connected therewith'.¹³⁷ The objects ranged from Persian and Arab helmets and shields to machine guns with examples of Gatling and Maxim guns in the centre of the room. An array of German machine guns and other trophies of war had been donated to the Museum by the Army Council of Great Britain. This display was perhaps inspired by the most famous example of the thematic display model, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.¹³⁸

Cells Two and Five are particularly intriguing. They were designed to recreate the interiors of Swahili and Arab homes respectively. According to the 'Guide to the Annexe' written by Ingrams for the opening and also published in the *Gazette*, the room 'arranged by Swahilis' showed a typical home prior to the introduction of modern utensils. Modern implements were arranged on a ledge with a kiSwahili notice explaining the 'principles that should [be] adopted to maintain hygienic conditions in huts'.¹³⁹ The intention was to show how the simple and traditional could be made modern and hygienic. Literacy levels meant that much of the target audience would require a spoken explanation.

An Arab interior 'of the old style' was installed in Cell Five based upon the description by Seyyida Salme in her memoirs, the text of which was displayed outside the room on a placard.¹⁴⁰ This display was deliberately historic, yet there was no comparable message encouraging the Arabs to modernise, suggesting either that they were already keen acquirers of modern material goods, or that it was not tactful to intervene.

Cell Three served two purposes, both of which testified to the cosmopolitan nature of the Swahili coast. The first was to explain the history of the kiSwahili language by displaying various dictionaries and grammar books. It highlighted the fluidity of the language and the incorporation of other languages, including English, into its vocabulary. This demonstrated both the wide-ranging global influences upon Zanzibar and the way in which the British in Zanzibar had categorised, Romanised and adapted kiSwahili language for modern use. This cell also had a section about trade. Historic imports and exports were compared with contemporary trade goods, using

specimens of articles from the trade reports. Frustratingly, Ingrams only describes these as 'specimens' so we do not know which objects he chose for this comparison.

The theme of trade and exchange was continued in Cell Four which displayed the handiwork of immigrant races into Zanzibar. The Somalis were well represented by a display of spears, swords, wooden pillows and prayer mats. They were one of the many merchant groups who were temporary residents on the island according to the monsoons. The other peoples who visited in that period were illustrated under the heading 'Persian Gulf'. The Nyamwezi of Tanganyika were described as the most important immigrants to Zanzibar due to their work on the clove plantations. The Manyema of the Congo and the Kikuyu of Kenya colony were also represented.

This cell, in its antiquated and racially defined way, provided far more information about the complexity of Zanzibar's population than the display in the main Museum building. It acknowledged the radically changing population according to the season, which was one of the defining features of the year for the majority of the island's inhabitants.

This annexe exhibit in the Indian gaol was short-lived. There is no mention of it after 1927 and its collection presumably became subsumed into the main Museum after the erection of the new extension building in 1930. It was nonetheless significant in its method of display. The thematic sections attempted to place Zanzibar in a world context, and sought to show the range of external influences had been absorbed from other places. References to consultation with Swahili people over the design are important – though all too sparse – and no other supporting references have been located. Such activity should not be over-interpreted, but at this stage, in the late 1920s, it is notable that 'authenticity' was deemed desirable and that there was some local participation in the production.

Temporary exhibitions of a few months were made practicable by the construction of the permanent extension building. Nicol Smith attempted to organise regular exhibitions, knowing their novelty might attract visitors. Her first one tied in with the introduction of the general East African currency in 1936 and exhibited the Museum's coin collection. Later that year the most successful special exhibition was held to celebrate the Sultan's Diamond Jubilee. A stamp exhibition of 1937 failed to attract much interest, but in 1939 the advent of war brought popular, regularly changing exhibits. Nicol Smith used the Museum as one way of disseminating the latest news as part of her additional duties as Assistant Information Officer in wartime, with displays of photographs and newspaper cuttings.

Natural History: the Local and the Unusual

The nucleus of the natural history collections came from Aders's collection. Specimens of scientific and economic interest were his priority, with little initial regard for the interests of the public. No animals from outside Zanzibar were to be displayed. Yet exceptions were regularly made, for example a curious hippopotamus skull found in Mbweni in 1927. An elephant's skull, visible in [Figure 4.14](#), is displayed prominently and near to the Natural History exhibits, but the archival records show that it was used to discuss the ivory trade and Zanzibar's role as a vital trading entrepôt, rather than its own zoological interest.

These specimens were intended to explain the dangers of certain animals to the public, which fish were good for health and other didactic messages. The local visitors, however, had a more direct fascination with the stuffed mammals, birds and pickled reptiles – a universal reaction in the history of museums to viewing zoological exhibits. The Sultana reportedly chose the snakes as her favourite exhibit.¹⁴¹

In 1925 the mammals and birds of Zanzibar and Pemba were displayed by main Museum entrance door ([Figure 4.14](#)). The unusual and the everyday shared the cases: a rare Pemba duiker alongside a shrew-mouse, a common inhabitant of Zanzibar Town. The duiker, a small antelope, was acquired in late 1927, much to the pride of Spurrier, as only two other specimens existed, one in the British Museum (Natural History) collection and one owned by Arthur Loveridge, the notable biologist and herpetologist, who had discovered the species. Over 23 birds were mounted, and nests were displayed in various stages of development. Another rarity, a coconut crab, more commonly found in the Indo-Pacific islands, was sent by Mr Vaughan from Pemba. Members of the Museum staff were trained to collect specimens, in particular butterflies ([Figure 4.15](#)).

Figure 4.14 Displays around the main entrance. BM: Af,B19.30.

Such was the popularity of the zoological collections that they rapidly grew and diversified in this period. Aders wrote to Spurrier in September 1928 that once the mounted leopard arrived 'we shall be I think full up'. The first mention of the necessity of a new building came as early as 1925. The need to house the natural history collections appropriately as well as the desire for a research laboratory and for an improved space for projecting films and lantern lectures, led to the decision to fundraise for the new permanent extension.

In the new permanent extension, the plentiful natural history collections were divided into mammals, birds and reptiles and a new section devoted to marine biology. Nets and fishing tackle were hung alongside rare fish and coral, deliberately to encourage practical application of an understanding of marine life. By 1935, the collection was believed to be exhaustive of the birds and mammals of the islands. Nicol Smith was assisted greatly in this section by the enthusiasm for ornithology of R. H. W. Pakenham, an Administrative Officer who wrote a comprehensive guide to the birds of Zanzibar and Pemba and was instrumental in collecting specimens for the Museum and writing labels in English and kiSwahili. Similarly, the conchological collections were significantly developed in 1943–44 thanks to the personal interest of J. D. Robertson, then acting curator.

Figure 4.15 'The Public Health Section'. BM: Af,B19.27.

Sensational exhibits were acquired when possible, such as the largest known Zanzibar leopard. Zoological curiosities often found their way to the Museum. The biggest attraction of 1939 was a crocodile, which probably drifted over from the mainland and landed alive at the south end of the island but soon died (Figure 4.16). Visitor numbers rose significantly, as local people rushed to see it. The crocodile may also have had a spiritual purpose associated with local medical beliefs. In a passing reference, Nicol Smith revealed that 'the crocodile is having his scales stolen for medicine'.¹⁴²

Unusual and freakish animals consistently found their way to the Museum, the first of these, a three-legged goat, in December 1928. This was trumped in 1941 by a six-legged goat. The introduction of live exhibits in 1936 for 'the amusement of children and the interest of tourists' required ponds to be dug in the Museum garden for two turtles. A display of live chameleons was very popular in 1944. This practice was common across the East African region and has endured: the majority of museums in Kenya have attached snake and reptile parks and caged animals. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the extension was consistently popular with local people, and significantly more so than the main Museum.

Figure 4.16 The large crocodile washed up in Zanzibar in 1939. This photograph was displayed alongside the stuffed animal in the Museum Annexe. ZNA: AV 32/18.

In 1958, the annual report for Nairobi's Coryndon Memorial Museum brought attention to the highlights of that year: 'Probably the two most important exhibits during the year were the Shakespeare Second

Folio and the living examples of rare snakes'.¹⁴³ This quotation encapsulates many of the experiences of curators in museums in East Africa. Their acquisitions were eclectic and unexpected. Meeting the needs of their multiple audiences meant that they consciously displayed a wide range of artefacts, specimens and live exhibits, all of which required different modes of display and ongoing care.

After the Revolution in Zanzibar, the colonial-era display remained unchanged for decades, leading people to believe that it had always been this way. In fact, from 1925 to 1942, the curators directed an active and dynamic process. Developing the collections was an opportunistic and diplomatic project. With few funds with which to realise the lofty ambitions of the Museum, objects had to be acquired when and how they could be. The curators were keenly aware of their role as 'trustees' of Zanzibar's culture and were determined to bring Zanzibari objects back to the island. Ingrams's short-lived annexe display represents a fascinating experiment in the construction of historical displays with a didactic purpose. The configuration of the exhibits did not deviate from basic Western and Arab conceptions, but donations by local people and their awareness of which objects of value or curiosity were sought by the curators represent a form of engagement in the Museum activity that has hitherto been overlooked.

Notable by its absence in the Museum was representation of the Indian community. They were regular donors, visitors, photographers and lecturers, but there were no artefacts or objects indicating their contribution to the island.¹⁴⁴ Though Indians had dominated craftsmanship in Zanzibar for decades, objects they had created on the model of Swahili designs were displayed in the Museum context of the 'native industries'. It could be argued that their preference for sponsorship of the Arts and Crafts Society (of which we will learn more in the next chapter) and their lack of material representation gave them a position of cultural authority and ownership of their own identity – an opportunity not offered to Zanzibar's other communities.

The western model of museums implies a prioritisation of material of 'genuine antiquity', but the local community displayed less excitement about this. They were far more intrigued by the natural and the modern world. While odd-legged goats were not typical museum objects, the curators knew they attracted the public. In the two buildings, the needs of diverse audiences were met.

- 1 Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', 106.
- 2 Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: Routledge, 2001), 247.
- 3 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 55–6; Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 35–6; Jonathan Woodham, 'Images of Africa and Design at the British Empire Exhibitions between the Wars', *Journal of Design History* 2, no. 1 (1989): 16–17.
- 4 ZNA: File 412, Horton, 'Museum Development and the National Heritage of Zanzibar'.
- 5 Sheriff, Voogt, and Luhila, *The Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum*, 20.
- 6 Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 13; Longair, 'Recovering and Reframing the Regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu'; Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', 3–63.
- 7 A fuller account of this exhibition can be found in Sarah Longair, 'Representing "Our Island Sultanate" in London and Zanzibar: Cross-Currents in Educating Imperial Publics', in *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire*, ed. John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).
- 8 MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 118. See Christine Boyanoski, 'Selective Memory: The British Empire Exhibition and National Histories of Art', in *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*, ed. Annie E. Coombes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 156–71 for a discussion about representation of the settler colonies at Wembley. See also Daniel Stephen, *The Empire of Progress: West Africans, Indians, and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition 1924–25* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 9 British Empire Exhibition Committee, *The British Empire Exhibition, 1924: Official Guide* (London: Fleetway Press, 1924), 1.
- 10 W. Hendry, 'Preface', in *Zanzibar: An Account of Its People, Industries and History*, i.
- 11 The Official Guide does not give a plan of the country displays so the internal layout is not clear, but the other countries in the East African section were the Sudan, Nyasaland, the Seychelles, Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda and Mauritius: *The British Empire Exhibition, 1924: Official Guide*, 58. Zanzibar lay between Uganda and Kenya.
- 12 Deborah L. Hughes discusses how this episode undermined the image of racial unity: Deborah L. Hughes, 'Kenya, India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924', *Race & Class* 47, no. 4 (April 2006): 66–85.
- 13 Donald Maxwell, *Wembley in Colour* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), 23; Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 41.
- 14 Woodham, 'Images of Africa and Design', 19. Woodham also discusses the impact the objects from Africa had on contemporary designers seeking inspiration.
- 15 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1749, 3 August 1925, 288.
- 16 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1593, 7 August 1922, 452; ZNA: BA 83/5, Sinclair, Report on the Zanzibar Protectorate from 1911–1923, 28.
- 17 Daniel M. Stephen, "'Brothers of the Empire?': India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–25", *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 2 (June 2011): 172.
- 18 Woodham, 'Images of Africa and Design', 18.
- 19 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1749, 1 August 1925, 288.
- 20 Hendry, 'Preface', i.
- 21 Mew describes how the ethnographic modes of representation formed the basis of museums established in West Africa and did not include this 'history' section. The French in West Africa initially prioritised aesthetic interest of objects, but increasingly became concerned with ethnography: 'Rethinking Heritage and Display', 113; 117.
- 22 W. H. Ingrams, 'Ethnology', in Hendry, 'Preface', 1.
- 23 Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, 16.
- 24 James Urry, "'Notes and Queries on Anthropology" and the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870–1920', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (January 1972), 45–57.
- 25 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 78.
- 26 Glassman explores how this narrative became a source of particular tension in the years

leading up to independence, particular between the significant mainland communities – leaders of the African Association – who were inferentially excluded. Ibid., 107.

27 Ingrams, 'History', 69.

28 *Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 698, 14 June 1905, 3.

29 Ingrams, 'History', 76.

30 Films to accompany the whole exhibition were made with particular countries featured: www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1050, accessed 15 October 2011. The silent black and white Zanzibar film opens with images evoking the old town and the Sultan and focuses on the clove production process.

31 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1751, 15 August 1925, 230.

32 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1836, 2 April 1927, 67.

33 Ibid. Stephen notes that in 1925 a regular service ran from Mombasa to Hull, with producers in East Africa eager to ship goods there directly: Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 112.

34 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1784, 3 April 1926, 71.

35 Mew, 'Rethinking Heritage and Display', 113.

36 In West Africa, local donations were rare and not spontaneous but solicited: Mew, 'Rethinking Heritage and Display', 124.

37 ZNA: AB 41/1, Resident to High Commissioner, 23 September 1924.

38 ZNA: AB 41/1, Report of the Peace Memorial Hall Committee, November 1924.

39 MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire*, 267–77.

40 ZNA: DF 9/9, Richard Crofton to Ailsa Nicol Smith, undated letter, c. 1936–42.

41 ZNA: AB 41/1, Report of the Peace Memorial Hall Committee, November 1924.

42 Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1932), 191–2. He also visited a small museum in Abyssinia though the collection he describes for Emperor of Azania's museum indicates allusion to the Zanzibar Museum.

43 ZNA: AB 41/1, Museum Committee to British Resident, 9 August 1926.

44 ZNA: DF 9/31, Sultan's Private Secretary to Spurrier, 28 September 1925.

45 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1812, 16 October 1926, 225.

46 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1803, 14 August 1926, 180.

47 All these communities collected for themselves too – Waugh particularly noted the British community in Zanzibar for their conspicuous displays of material culture: Waugh, *Remote People*, 169.

48 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1938* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1939), 8.

49 See *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1851, 16 July 1927, 163.

50 For example, T. Ainsworth Dickson, Resident Commissioner at Mombasa and amateur anthropologist, contributed several pieces.

51 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 48.

52 ZNA: DF 7/1, Letter from Theodore Burt, 17 June 1925.

53 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 85.

54 ZNA: CA 1/8, Crofton to Spurrier, 1 September 1933.

55 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1943 and 1944* (Zanzibar, 1945), 3.

56 ZNA: CA 1/7, Hassan Ahmed to Spurrier, 10 December 1929.

57 Restitution of objects to their original owners is the subject of much contentious debate in the contemporary museum world. See Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, and Paul Turnbull, eds, *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002).

58 ZNA: DF 7/2, Lyne to Nicol Smith, 24 July 1939.

59 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1818, 27 November 1926, 266.

60 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 49.

61 ZNA: CA 1/6, MacDonald to Spurrier, 25 July 1928.

62 Ibid.

63 This lively correspondence is discussed in detail in Longair, 'Recovering and Reframing the Regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu'.

- 64 Quoted in letter ZNA: CA 1/6, MacDonald to Spurrier, 8 September 1928.
- 65 ZNA: DF 7/3, Crofton to Spurrier, 2 September 1928; CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 28 August 1928.
- 66 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1921, 1 November 1928, 311.
- 67 ZNA: CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 28 August 1928.
- 68 ZNA: DF 7/3, List of objects in the Said-Ruete case, 24 October 1932; Said-Ruete to Nicol Smith, 2 September 1937; Said-Ruete to Saunders-Jones, 10 May 1937.
- 69 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1939* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1940), 9.
- 70 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 51.
- 71 NMT: AM101.D33/R46, 'Fourth Annual Report of the King George V Museum, Dar es Salaam of 1945', 17 April 1946, 33.
- 72 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1940* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1941), 4.
- 73 *Ibid.*
- 74 ZNA: AB 31/15, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 30 June 1942.
- 75 ZNA: DF 9/10, Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner of Zanzibar, 23 December 1943.
- 76 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1941* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1942), 4.
- 77 My thanks to Dr Vesta Curtis of the British Museum for this translation.
- 78 ZNA: DF 9/1, Chief Secretary, Memorandum, enclosed in Spurrier to Museum Committee Chairman, 26 June 1935.
- 79 ZNA: DF 9/31, H. Koritschoner to Nicol Smith, 3 January 1941. Koritschoner was an amateur anthropologist who published several articles on his observations, for example Hans Koritschoner, 'Some East African Native Songs', *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 4 (1937): 51–64.
- 80 ZNA: DF 9/9, Richard Crofton to Ailsa Nicol Smith, undated letter, c. 1936–42.
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1936* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1937), 5.
- 83 ZNA: DF 9/5, Curator to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1957.
- 84 Archives of the CMAA, Nicol Smith to Clark, 3 March 1937.
- 85 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1939*, 4.
- 86 Ingrams, *Zanzibar: Its History and Its People*, 150.
- 87 For further details of this debate, see Longair, 'Recovering and Reframing the Regalia of the Mwinyi Mkuu', 166–7.
- 88 Thompson noted this 'elementary trap' of Sinclair's design: Thompson, 'Tropical Island Museum', 342–3.
- 89 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1754, 5 September 1925, 322.
- 90 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 47.
- 91 NMT: AM101.D33/R46, Nicol Smith, Speech to South African Museums Association meeting July 1941, 16.
- 92 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1936*, 6.
- 93 Like others at the time, Ingrams attributed the construction of Great Zimbabwe to the South Arabian peoples. Randall MacIver was the first to suggest it had Shona origins in *Medieval Rhodesia* (London: MacMillan, 1906). Gertrude Caton-Thompson's ground-breaking archaeological research in 1928–29 confirmed the site's African origins: ZNA: BA 106/8, Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 9; Gertrude Caton-Thompson, *The Zimbabwe Culture: Ruins and Reactions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).
- 94 ZNA: BA 106/8, W. H. Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 10.
- 95 ZNA: BA 106/8, W. H. Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 11.
- 96 ZNA: BA 106/8, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 11–12.
- 97 ZNA: DF 9/1, McElderry, Memorandum, enclosed in Spurrier to Museum Committee

Chairman, 26 June 1935.

98 'Shirazi' became a complicated identity marker in nascent nationalist discourse: Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 26; 52–3.

99 ZNA: BA 106/10, A Short Guide to the Zanzibar Museum, 1933, 7.

100 ZNA: BA 106/8, Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 20.

101 Ibid.

102 ZNA: DF 7/1, Letter from Theodore Burt, 17 June 1925.

103 ZNA: DF 9/5, Curator to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1957.

104 ZNA: DF 9/5, Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare) to Archivist/Curator, 31 August 1962.

105 ZNA: DF 9/5, Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare) to Archivist/Curator, 8 February 1963.

106 For example: Stephanie Wynne-Jones, 'Recovering and Remembering a Slave Route in Central Tanzania', in *Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and Memory*, ed. Paul Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald, Proceedings of the British Academy, 168 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 317–42.

107 Clare Pettitt, *Dr Livingstone, I Presume?: Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers and Empire* (London: Profile, 2007); Felix Driver, 'Old Hat, I Presume?: History of a Fetish', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 41 (1996): 230–34. There was a suggestion in 1926 that Livingstone's house become a museum solely for relics of Livingstone, a plan that did not come to fruition, to the benefit of the Zanzibar Museum. *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1810, 2 October 1926, 215

108 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 63. The chest was donated by Kirk's daughters.

109 Waugh, *Remote People*, 169.

110 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 64.

111 ZNA: DF 7/2, Jenkins of Smith MacKenzie & Co. to Spurrier, 24 June 1925.

112 Felix Driver, 'Henry Morton Stanley and His Critics: Geography, Exploration and Empire', *Past & Present* 133, no. 1 (1 November 1991): 161–4; Iain R. Smith, *The Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, 1886 – 1890*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 77–83.

113 Ingrams, 'History'; Hendry, 'Preface', 69; 72.

114 ZNA: BA 106/10, A Short Guide to the Zanzibar Museum, 1933, 6.

115 De Vere Allen, 'The Kiti Cha Enzi', 56.

116 Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs*, 128–33.

117 Coupland visited in 1928 to study documents about Kirk in advance of writing *Kirk on the Zambezi*. This was the first of several publications on East Africa. See also Chapter 3, p. 127.

118 ZNA: BA 106/8, Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 20–1.

119 ZNA: BA 106/8, Ingrams, Guide to the Historical and Ethnological Section, 1927, 21.

120 For further discussion of 'salvage ethnography', see James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory' in *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1986), 98–121; Mew, 'Rethinking Heritage and Display', 83, 91.

121 Ingrams, *Zanzibar: Its History and its People*, 7.

122 ZNA: AB 31/14, Acting Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 19 July 1935.

123 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 52–3.

124 Sheriff, Voogt and Luhila's quote at the start of this chapter, p. 152, demonstrates this contemporary view.

125 Gillman and Smith, 'A Museum in Tanganyika', 172. See Staniforth, 'Becoming Human', 304–11.

126 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1800, 24 July 1926, 164.

127 ZNA: BA 106/7, W. H. Ingrams, The Ascent of Man and the Evolution of Zanzibar, 1926, 1.

128 ZNA: BA 106/7, Ingrams, The Ascent of Man, 1926, 1; Kuklick, 'The British Tradition', 61.

129 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1832, 5 March 1927, 51.

130 ZNA: CA 1/7, Jivanjee to Spurrier, 12 February 1929.

- 131 My thanks to Andrea Schiebler for deciphering this text and discussing the translation.
- 132 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1905, 21 July 1928, 195.
- 133 ZNA: BA 106/9, W. H. Ingrams, Guide to the Annexe, 1927, 3.
- 134 ZNA: DF 9/10, Museum Committee Chairman to Chief Secretary, 19 April 1945.
- 135 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1824, 8 January 1927, 7.
- 136 KiSwahili was more commonly read by the Arab community than Arabic. The ability to read Arabic was a source of pride amongst elite families: Glassman, 'Slower than a Massacre', 733.
- 137 ZNA: BA 106/9, Ingrams, Guide to the Annexe, 4.
- 138 The Pitt Rivers Museum, though most famous for the typological, cross-cultural nature of its displays, did organise objects in a variety of ways and its early curators frequently moved objects around, experimenting with different arrangements of the series: Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*, 22–4.
- 139 ZNA: BA 106/9, Ingrams, Guide to the Annexe, 6.
- 140 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 141 ZNA: CA 1/6, Jennie Pearson to Spurrier, 8 February 1928.
- 142 ZNA: AD 5/94A, Nicol Smith to Director of Education, 1 December 1941. Crocodiles are not native to Zanzibar, though on the mainland their scales were ground up to use as *dawa* (medicine), especially to treat small children. Prof. Kim Howell reported that a pangolin specimen in the University of Dar es Salaam had to be locked up as its scales were being stolen. It is likely that either these were stolen by people from the mainland or that such practices were shared. My thanks to Martin Walsh for this discussion.
- 143 ZNA: BB 58/9, Coryndon Memorial Museum, Nairobi, Annual Report for 1958, 5.
- 144 It is interesting to note that in the Nairobi National Museum in the last 20 years, the Indian community has in general not been represented. A photographic exhibition that displayed the history of Asians in Kenya in 2000 was one of the most popular exhibitions in its recent history. Discussion with Curator at NMK, May 2009.

Explaining the ‘Puzzling New World’: Education and Reaching Out beyond the Museum, 1925–1942

On 14 July 1945, Eslanda Goode Robeson was mid-way through a tour of East and Southern Africa. She spent the day in Zanzibar, and her diary entry confirms that the Museum’s reputation now extended far beyond the confines of the island:

Hired a car and a guide so that Pauli and I might see as much as possible of the island. We stopped at the famous museum. As we arrived at the entrance we saw a class of Indian and Arab schoolgirls leaving, chattering and giggling as schoolgirls will, and very picturesque in their motley dress – some in shorts, some in saris, and some with veils.¹

This quotation illustrates well the progress of the Zanzibar Museum since opening in 1925. The institution’s reputation clearly reached well beyond the island. Sir Henry Miers and S. F. Markham enthusiastically described the Zanzibar Museum ‘as one of the best educational museums’ in British Africa, recognition that facilitated access to funds for public health education programmes from the Carnegie Corporation via the MA.² Ailsa Nicol Smith’s articles in the *Museums Journal* and *Oversea Education* brought her work to the attention of museum and education circles in Britain and the Empire.

The primary audience for the Museum was not overseas visitors such as Robeson but the local community. The ambitious aspiration of its founders was to provide more than just a repository for historical artefacts, they sought to ‘improve the lot of the labouring classes of the island’ through instruction about public health and agricultural matters. This objective was informed by the missionary ethos of Spurrier, a mantle taken on enthusiastically by Nicol Smith.

This chapter will investigate to what extent the Museum became ‘an educational centre for all communities’, and succeeded in reaching beyond the urban elite to the ‘labouring classes’ who made up 90 per cent of the island’s population. As seen in [Chapter 3](#), the timing of the Museum’s foundation in the mid-1920s exposed it to intersecting forces from different fields: colonial policy, anthropology and museums. In its first decade, the Museum became a rallying point for the combined needs of the Educational, Medical and Agricultural Departments. Sir Claud Hollis, the British Resident, singled out the

Museum's cooperation with these departments for particular praise in his address to the Legislative Council in December 1928.³ This was both an ideological and economic necessity; the Museum's activities justified the 'trusteeship' of the local people by improving their health and living conditions and, in the long term, by enhancing the economic potential of Zanzibar. From the late 1920s to 1940s trends in colonial development would ultimately undermine the public health component of the Museum's mission.⁴

This chapter will suggest that it was Governmental intervention from the mid-1930s, rather than a lack of interest from visitors, that limited the scope of the Museum's success and the range of communities with whom the Museum engaged. This occurred in spite of the specific interest of the Colonial Office in the Museum's pioneering programmes.

The demise and neglect of the Zanzibar Museum in the 1970s and 1980s has erased from the historiography of the island its importance as a dedicated educational institution. The expansion of the museums in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam from the 1950s onwards, driven by large numbers of trained personnel and globally renowned archaeological discoveries, invites unfavourable comparisons. Such judgments, however, belie the innovation of the Zanzibar Museum in its first 20 years. This enterprising and experimental spirit was borne from a commitment to transform the Museum into an instructive and relevant institution. The slow pace of development of the Western school system in Zanzibar made this an imperative, and the Museum committed to filling the gap by providing education to adults. The determination of Spurrier and Aders to connect with their audiences led to the innovative decision to use film in a museum as an educational medium, probably the first example in sub-Saharan Africa.

Additional funds were required to realise the Museum's ambitious education programme. Miers and Markham visited during their survey of the museums of British Africa on behalf of the MA. Their effusive endorsement of the educational mission of the Zanzibar Museum facilitated access to funds for public health education programmes from the Carnegie Corporation.⁵ This grant was awarded in 1935 in two tranches of £500 to fund pioneering projects in rural areas using film, talks and improved exhibits for the 'general betterment of the inhabitants of the Protectorate'.⁶ While such outreach is commonplace in museums today, this stands as a pioneering example of such a programme in a British African territory. The administration and spending of this grant, however, fuelled debates in Government over the purpose and responsibilities of the Museum. Disputes over expenditure and the need to meet the requirements of the awarding

body would eventually threaten the Museum's educational mission.

This analysis will first be situated within the context of British colonial education policy in Africa and then make specific reference to education in Zanzibar. After sketching a picture of contemporaneous museum education in Britain, the study will focus on the instructive activity of the Zanzibar Museum in its various forms: its programmes for schools and adults, its resources including the library and cinema, and its activities. The chapter concludes with an attempt to evaluate the impact of these programmes: quantitatively with recorded figures, and qualitatively, through accounts and reports as well as by comparison with other cultural activities in Zanzibar. This chapter is illustrated with photographs organised by Nicol Smith from articles in the *Museums Journal*, published at a time when she was determined to prove her professional status to the Government. They provide a constructed portrayal of the daily life of the Museum and its harmonious dealings with local communities. They are instructive in showing a multi-cultural education space: an image she believed presented the Museum in the best possible light to reflect well on her work.

Colonial Education in Africa

The historiography of colonial education policy is vast and complex, and is rendered still more so by the intersection between academic analysis and practice during the colonial period. As education policies were executed on the ground across the Empire, practitioners, policy-makers, commentators and anthropologists simultaneously scrutinised and debated their purpose and practice in journals and on committees.⁷ It is important to note at this stage that, regardless of this intense interest, there was no single model of educational strategy across the Empire.⁸ In the first half of the twentieth century, policies were enacted locally rather than from clear directives from Whitehall, especially in British sub-Saharan Africa. Aaron Windel has identified broad phases in colonial educational activity in Africa: the first ending with the First World War, until which point education was dominated by the missionary civilising project, acting independently of government; the second phase, the interwar period, where education became a more central, yet still under-funded, element of the Colonial Office's work; and the third phase from 1940 with the passing of the Colonial Welfare and Development Act, legislation which enacted many of the recommendations made in Lord Hailey's *African Survey* of 1938.⁹

The interwar phase will form the focus of this study. Before 1921 there was no coherent concept of a broad 'British Education' in Africa.

After the First World War and with the creation of the League of Nations, 'Native Education' became a central part of the imperial mission.¹⁰ The Devonshire Declaration reframed the role of the British Government. It was now 'exercising a trust on behalf of the African population ... the object of which may be defined as the protection and advancement of the native races'.¹¹ 'Native Education Policy' between the wars became a site of contestation between the competing interests of the colonial state, missionary societies, international organisations, particularly those based in the United States, and Africans themselves.¹² A delicate balance had to be struck: the need for a literate local auxiliary staff required an education policy that promoted rather than undermined indirect rule.¹³

In 1925 the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa (later renamed the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies) proposed a model which came to be known as 'adapted education':

Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution.¹⁴

Adapted educational programmes were created to teach what experts considered traditional cultural practice in a medium to suit the so-called 'African mind'. This approach gained support through a combination of financial, political and academic backing. Adherence to this philosophy united the Colonial Office, social anthropologists and American philanthropic foundations, such as Rockefeller, Phelps Stokes and the Carnegie Corporation.¹⁵ For example, the latter organisation funded the Jeanes Schools, a model imported from the United States, which trained African Americans as teachers. The first Jeanes teachers in Kenya in 1924 were trained in 'rural uplift' and were expected to return to their villages to impart these new practices to teachers, pupils and adults in schools.¹⁶

Despite the commissions and research into the perceived needs of indigenous people, insufficient funds from the Colonial Office accompanied these proclamations of trusteeship and support for African self-sufficiency.¹⁷ American philanthropic organisations provided the bulk of the funding in the interwar period ensuring that their own principles prevailed.

Adapted education was criticised from various directions. In many regions of Africa, the academic curriculum initiated by missionaries in the nineteenth century continued.¹⁸ Based on the British education curriculum, this more scholarly model was sought out in the 1930s by

new African elites dissatisfied with the adapted education practices. Contemporary British critics, such as Norman Leys, felt the unequal distribution of land and wealth was a greater threat than the destruction of traditional African social life.¹⁹ Critics of adapted education in the late colonial and postcolonial period regarded the policy as part of a colonial conspiracy to deprive Africans of formal education in order to control the rise of nationalism.²⁰

The language associated with the adapted education policy of the 1920s was rearticulated as a welfare and development discourse in the 1930s. This decade was characterised by pressure upon officials with little financial backing to develop the areas of activity of which the Zanzibar Museum is a good example. The commission and publication of Lord Hailey's survey, and the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940, finally brought the allocation of significant funds from London for social welfare programmes. In the wake of the Second World War, education policy and the theory of trusteeship more broadly needed to be re-evaluated to meet the challenge of economically straitened times and social upheaval in both Britain and the Empire.²¹

The inchoate nature of this policy and the lack of allocated funds contributed to its ineffective application. As the Colonial Office recognised, each territory had different needs. Zanzibar's mixed religious and socially stratified communities presented particular challenges. The Zanzibar Museum's development in the 1920s drew language from adapted education principles fused with the particular knowledge and experience of Spurrier and his colleagues. These aims were rearticulated and reprioritised in the 1930s under pressure to address welfare issues more explicitly, although as we shall see, the Museum's role in welfare education began to be disputed.

Education in Colonial Zanzibar

Zanzibar was home to various educational establishments well before the foundation of the British Protectorate in 1890. Qu'ran schools had long existed on the islands and the East African coast.²² The Indian minority established their own schools on the British model in the late nineteenth century, based on those in the subcontinent, creating staggered stages of educational development across the British Indian Ocean territories.²³ Missionary schools operated on the island from the 1870s, catering mainly to immigrant labourers from the mainland and later to manumitted slaves. The wealthy Indian merchant, Sir Tharia Topan, raised funds in the 1890s to establish a madrasa for Indian boys, opened in 1891 as the Sir Euan Smith Madrasa, named after Sir Charles Euan Smith, Consul General from 1888 to 1891.²⁴

In the early years of the British Protectorate, educational policy was a particularly thorny issue for the British administration and the source of much debate, involving questions of religion and community but limited action.²⁵ William Hendry, Director of Education from 1920, later tried to argue that this lack of activity was beneficial: progress that was not ‘over-swift’ suited the social atmosphere in Zanzibar.²⁶ Hendry maintained that the delays, obstacles and conflicts encountered in Zanzibar led to more judicious decision-making over education policy for its people. There were two principal contributing factors to the implementation of an education strategy in the early years of the Protectorate: first, a lack of effective and sustained government policy; second, the reluctance within the Arab communities to accept secular education which was forbidden by Islamic teaching until boys had become *hitimu* – that is, able to read the Qu’ran.²⁷ At this time little attention was paid to the education of the rural population.

In 1905 funds were allocated to create a Department of Education and, in the same year, the first Government Central School opened for Arab boys. One motive of the British administration was to counter the Indian dominance of clerical and administrative roles in Government. The first Director of Education, J. Rivers-Smith, was appointed in 1907 following harsh criticism of the Government in Akers’s survey for its failure to develop the school system (see [Chapter 1](#)). Rivers-Smith’s previous service in Egypt was considered the ideal training for educating Muslim communities.

The First World War exacerbated the slow pace of change, stagnating the process as schools opened and then quickly closed. Many parents resisted sending their sons to school for financial and ideological reasons, discouraged by the fees and the content of the teaching, such as learning Latin script.²⁸ The Government made little provision for rural areas and it is worth recalling Ingrams’s secret construction of a school in Pemba in the early 1920s, discussed in [Chapter 3](#). Revived interest at Colonial Office level after the war led to the formation of a commission in Zanzibar in 1920 to create an educational policy with Hendry now directing the Education Department. By the mid-1920s, Government schools in the town were well established, with some limited expansion into rural areas. Between 1923 and 1927, the number of district schools increased from four to ten.²⁹ Hendry’s description of one of the district schools offers a concrete example of adapted education with lessons on gardening, native crafts and building *makuti* huts, as well as basic academic teaching.³⁰

The Teacher Training School, opened in 1923 under the direction of Hollingsworth, was intended by Hendry to encourage promising

young Arabs to become teachers, diverting them from the temptations of the town. He blamed lax parental control, prostitution, early marriage and widespread venereal disease for threatening the future of the Arab youth. By selecting the best of them to become teachers, Hendry intended 'to do all we can to protect them from themselves' through 'close European supervision'.³¹ He envisaged that a strong cohort of educated young Arab teachers would bring about improvements across society: 'In Zanzibar the young Arab is the natural leader: where he leads the African follows'.³² As observed earlier, the Teacher Training School became a vibrant and influential intellectual institution both for the young Arab scholars who shaped it to their own needs, and as a site for the exchange of knowledge between these young men and European educators.

Even in the 1920s, the majority of schools were urban and served the minority Arab and Indian communities, with only a small number of Government schools catering to the wider so-called 'African' population. The only reference to adult education for Zanzibaris is to the evening classes run by Spurrier in the early 1920s prior to his taking on the curatorial duties. These were attended by Government workers and others, including house-boys and cooks. Their instruction included kiSwahili and English. Spurrier hoped soon to extend this training to include handicrafts and first aid.³³ Many Europeans considered the Zanzibar's adult population a lost cause. Their educational instruction was generally directed through the Medical and Agricultural departments, rather than the Education Department.

Belief in the potential for education varied. The diverse communities were deemed to have varying and specific educational needs, by both the British education staff and the community members themselves. Hendry was positive about the potential for Zanzibar's youth. Thanks to Arab 'civilisation', pupils compared favourably with their British counterparts:

... the African Zanzibari is very far removed from the pagan of the interior. His many years of contact with civilisation have sharpened his intellect: indeed when the children are brought to the schools at the age of six or seven, their progress, provided they have ample feeding, is as quick as, if not quicker than, that of the average home child.³⁴

Schools were mainly defined by religious or ethnic group, such as the Ithnasheri Girls' School [Indian], the Hindu Free Girls' School, the Aga Khan Boys' School and St Joseph's Convent.

One application of the adapted education theory was visible in the Government girls' schools, the first of which opened in 1927. Islamic beliefs and practices were incorporated with instruction on how to become respectable wives and mothers.³⁵ In collaboration with

mosques, the moral aspects of Islam were taught to regulate and encourage 'clean, decent living'.³⁶ The emphasis on education in the 1930s was, according to adapted principles, vocational; thus the Government schools prioritised domestic science for girls as part of the welfare scheme designed to improve the health of Zanzibar's population and thus its economic situation.³⁷ However, as Decker's research has revealed, the female school students of the 1930s and 1940s were much more interested in English and Arabic than 'mothercraft'.³⁸ They thought of themselves as 'modern girls', creating an adolescent female culture that took them beyond the boundaries that had limited their mothers and grandmothers.³⁹

Opinions on educational matters were regularly expressed in the non-European press. For example, the Arab Association newspaper *Al-Falaq* debated the question of language teaching throughout the 1930s.⁴⁰ In July 1939, an article questioned the appointment of the new Director of Education, Mr Foster, who had experience in several East African dependencies. The writer believed that the people of Zanzibar should be considered and educated differently from those of an African country solely made up of the 'Native races'.⁴¹ This article also discussed the purpose of education and invoked the 'trusteeship' promised in the peace treaties following the First World War. The writer believed that education for indigenous populations by their colonial masters should provide the experience and skills ultimately required to rule themselves. Education in Zanzibar was far from fulfilling these criteria.

The Indian population was often highly critical of Government policy in the editorials of the *Samachar*, the Indian National Association newspaper. Educational opportunities were severely limited in East Africa in comparison with India. They felt under increasing pressure after years of preferential treatment for Government employment given to the Arab population. Education policy in 1937 was described in the newspaper as 'retrogressive' and in need of constructive change.⁴² The least they aspired to was a matriculation standard for both the Government school and the Government-aided educational institutions.

There was no steady upward trajectory of improvement and support for educational activity. Prior to the Second World War, several schools were closed due to lack of funds and a perceived lack of interest from rural communities persisted.

The Growth of Museum Education in Britain and Zanzibar

The Zanzibar Museum evolved at a time when museums in Britain were beginning to take their educational role seriously, revealing parallels in developments and exchanges between the metropole and periphery. By the end of the nineteenth century, schoolchildren and adults from all classes visited museums in Britain, mostly without the intervention of museum staff. Academic lectures to largely middle-class adult audiences were the main form of active education provided by these institutions. Alfred Haddon, an influential figure in Nicol Smith's museum training, championed education in museums in both the Horniman and Cambridge, taking a direct role by presenting lectures and improving displays, embedding education at the heart of the museum's activity.⁴³

The appointment of gallery demonstrators to interpret collections to the public became fashionable in the early 1910s. They were employed in the British Museum in 1911, the British Museum (Natural History) in 1912 and the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1914. Regional museums concurrently developed provision for schools in the pre-war period.⁴⁴ In 1913, the President of the MA, E. Howarth, described education in museums as 'in its widest significance ... the cult of the day'.⁴⁵

The First World War stimulated growth in public-centred activity, as museums tried to prove their very worth and purpose to society. However, wartime measures led to the decision by the Government to close the national museums in 1916.⁴⁶ Those that remained open expanded their education and special exhibition programmes, the focus of which often related to health, hygiene and agriculture. These exhibitions and programmes, which explicitly provided instruction on relevant contemporary issues, proved popular. Only a few of these initiatives, however, were sustained in the aftermath of the war. A suggestion made in 1918 to incorporate museums as part of the Board of Education was rejected. The then President of the MA, Sir Martin Conway, emphatically stated that 'museums are not fundamentally educational institutions'.⁴⁷ There was little potential for development of education in provincial museums where staff received little training and undertook a vast array of tasks. They were pitifully paid and often advanced in age with an out-dated vision of the social role of the museum.⁴⁸

This rejection of education as a core component of museums by the MA, and the characterisation of the backward-looking elderly curator, makes the example of Zanzibar all the more significant. Dr Spurrier was also a retiree with no formal training, whose pay was relatively low. Many of his sensibilities, as we have seen, reflected his upbringing in the late nineteenth century. However, his enlightened approach, energy and devotion to an improvement in well-being for

all communities, set his ambitions for the Museum in stark contrast to the conservative attitude of many of his counterparts in Britain. MacKenzie brings our attention to how museums were modern institutions devoted to the past – for some a paradox but in fact ideally suited to an ageing colonial scientist such as Spurrier.⁴⁹ Colonial experience in his case moulded a progressive approach to museums.

From the start, education formed part of the core mission of the Zanzibar Museum, rather than a supplementary activity imposed upon an unsuitable collection. Other factors contributed to the continued prioritisation of education. Hollingsworth, in his dual role of schoolteacher and director of the Teacher Training School, was a keen proponent of education in the Museum. He served on the Museum Committee from 1927 until 1944, and throughout this time brought school students and trainee teachers on trips, instilling the value of the Museum. Samuel McElderry, Chief Secretary in the 1930s and another Museum Committee member, was, as we have seen, initially a keen advocate of the pioneering outreach programme, championing the application for funding from the Carnegie Corporation. On the practical side, the style of teaching in the Museum in the 1920s, for example, Spurrier's promotion of craftsmanship skills, was suited to the prevailing principles of adapted education theory.⁵⁰ The philosophy to 'teach by doing' befitted the Museum, with its collection of objects from village life, traditional practices and agriculture.

Ailsa Nicol Smith's appointment, and the fact that as a woman she was appointed at all, confirmed education as a central component of the curator's role. Nicol Smith accepted Spurrier's mission wholeheartedly, and in 1939, after three years spent consolidating the collections and expanding her understanding of the Zanzibari context, she shifted the focus of her attention to the education section. As noted earlier, Nicol Smith felt that museums were particularly powerful for the 'less sophisticated African minds' and that 'visual information makes a special appeal to illiterate people'.⁵¹ She evidently did not only wish to work with the Indian and Arab school students. She believed that 'popular work makes a museum alive and is of immediate value to the community'.⁵² By 1939, she was confident that the existing education programme in the Museum was functioning well, and her main role was to create a rural museum service 'to exercise the educational capacity of the Museum to its fullest extent'.⁵³ While museums in overseas territories could easily become the preserve of a few enthusiastic European specialists, Nicol Smith was convinced that a museum in Africa 'can and should do more for the natives than concern itself with erudition only'.⁵⁴ She

arrived as a museum cataloguer and documentation specialist, but it was to the educational sector that she dedicated the remainder of her career in Zanzibar and beyond.

Teaching through the Museum's Collection: Programmes for Schools and Adults

School groups were a core audience for the Museum. Only days after its opening, Hollingsworth wrote to Spurrier to arrange his first visit with school students to complement his course on the history of Zanzibar.⁵⁵ He continued to visit regularly with schools until his departure in 1944. As discussed in earlier chapters, the history syllabus and the *School History of Zanzibar* textbook that Hollingsworth wrote with Ingrams related closely to the Museum's historical narrative and exhibits. The content of the Museum's history programme for schools was listed in the 1936 report, in which Nicol Smith described a series of talks that she gave to older students in the Museum. Over successive weeks, she presented the following chronological series of talks:

1. The Zenj Empire
2. The Portuguese
3. Seyyid Said (including Mwenyi Mkuu [sic] and Seyyida Salme)
4. Barghash and the later Sultans
5. Sir Lloyd Mathews; Sir John Kirk
6. Tippoo Tib and the Explorers; The Slave Trade and its suppression.⁵⁶

These talks corresponded to the Arab–British scheme of the Museum displays and clear emphasis was placed upon Zanzibar's foreign rulers and the achievements of the Arabs and the British. At the time such a history was not in question. Decker's research includes the recollections of one woman who was taught history from Hollingsworth's textbook. She remembered feeling disappointed when she attended Makerere College in Uganda in the 1970s and was taught history from an Africanist perspective. Her school day 'heroes' such as Vasco da Gama were turned into villains.⁵⁷ Other than the Mainyi Wakuu rulers, who were discussed in relation to Seyyid Said, the Museum programme reinforced the message from the textbooks that Zanzibar's history was the story of civilised foreign figures and explorers from overseas.

Hollingsworth not only contributed to the narrative of these displays but set an example of how to enrich school teaching by

visiting the Museum. From the late 1920s, the Teacher Training School regularly came for its course on local history with specific lectures incorporating exhibits and specimens.⁵⁸ Trainee teachers were encouraged to bring students to follow the model that they themselves learned in the Museum. Teachers in Indian private schools also valued the Museum as an educational resource; Spurrier cited an example of a teacher from the Euan Smith Madrasa attending personal lessons on hygiene before teaching the subject to his students.⁵⁹

Figure 5.1 Arab girls leaving the main Museum building. TNA: CN 3/24/9.

By 1926, private school pupils visited the Museum regularly and Government schools soon followed suit.⁶⁰ Spurrier gave personal tours to these groups although these lapsed towards the end of his life. Nicol Smith reinvigorated the relationship with schools to ‘supplement by visual information the work done in the classrooms’.⁶¹ Her interaction with boys’ and girls’ schools differed. For the former, she guided the teachers in how to teach through the exhibits, while she taught the schoolgirls personally.

Figure 5.2 Ailsa Nicol Smith teaching a history lesson to a group of Indian schoolgirls in the main Museum. TNA: CN 3/24/10.

Provision was made early on to enable Muslim women to visit during specially allocated time slots. In 1926, Aders wrote to Spurrier that he was pleased to hear of ‘more purdah ladies’ visiting.⁶² However, it was only with Nicol Smith’s arrival that direct teaching occurred for female students, opening up new possibilities for these young women (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Visits occurred when the Museum was closed to the public to observe purdah conditions. The Museum supported certain aspects of the domestic science curriculum for girls, such as hygiene and health, and Nicol Smith also taught history to female pupils. By offering such academic subjects, these visits provided access to the ‘modern’ education sought by female students; learning history, even from the British colonial perspective, represented a unique opportunity for these girls. Nicol Smith was impressed by their ‘keen, intelligent interest’ and believed that the trip to the Museum was ‘something of an adventure for them’.⁶³

The programme of teaching for adults took a variety of forms. Adult education – a term widely used in the twenty-first century – was not a separate subsection of education in the Empire at this time. The descriptions of what could broadly fall under the term ‘adult education’ included literacy lessons, which had taken place in Zanzibar in the missions for decades, training for specialist professions, artisan skills, and guidance on health and agriculture

issues. The Zanzibar Museum addressed all these topics and taught them through various media.

Tours of the Museum were given annually to locally trained Government bodies, including the police and armed forces, which brought their recruits for regularly throughout the 1920s and 30s (Figure 5.3). Apprentices of the Medical Department attended several lectures.⁶⁴ A visit organised in July 1928 by J. S. Last, the Provincial Commissioner, brought the *Masheha* – the local administrative personnel. For this visit, members of the Museum staff who were ordinarily engaged in menial tasks interpreted the displays for the visitors.⁶⁵

In 1937, Nicol Smith launched a free regular evening lecture series for adults addressing subjects including culture, history and natural history. The lecturers were European, Arab and Indian and the topics were diverse: from conchology to local history, and from lessons in English to discussions by visiting speakers on topical international issues. Some lectures were closely related to the collection, others simply a subject of the speaker's interest. The first few events attracted hundreds of attendees beyond the capacity of the space but regular attendance became more steady and manageable. Nicol Smith wrote in her 1939 Report for the MA regarding the Carnegie Fund that 'I have only to advertise a special exhibit or lecture and all the native communities come flocking'.⁶⁶

The inclusion of practical lessons on craftsmanship had been an original part of Spurrier's vision for the Museum. As discussed in Chapter 1, anxiety about the gradual loss of 'craftsmanship skills' long predated the 1920s policy of adapted education. Spurrier had been an early proponent of this: as acting Director of Education in the 1910s he fought to retain tools and equipment to encourage craftsmanship.⁶⁷ Plans were made in the early 1920s to develop Spurrier's evening craftsmanship classes for adults once the Museum was open, these were to include weaving for which a loom and warping machine were acquired. Spurrier also intended to teach 'short practical courses for particular sets of pupils, e.g. first-aid for Public Works Department, railway and pier-construction men'.⁶⁸ No further reference is made to this programme by the late 1920s. In 1928, the Education Department admitted that African artisanship was the area where substantial and real co-operation was most required, yet where the least had been achieved. The authorities believed that the main problem lay in localities where 'Asiatics have already a firm hold [on the labour market]', another echo from 1905.⁶⁹ They were determined to redouble their efforts in what constituted a 'moral obligation to the African'.⁷⁰ It seems that Spurrier was unable to realise this element of the Museum's educational remit, whether through lack of time or

Public Health Education

Public health was the main strand of the Museum collection intended for Zanzibar's adult population. These principles and ideas were mediated through talks, demonstrations, exhibits and didactic images. Aders's experiments in this field in the 1910s proved the efficacy of these media. By 1922 he claimed that through demonstrations and lectures 'a great number of Africans are now conversant with the metamorphosis of the mosquito and while the fact that the insect is actually a disease carrier is still somewhat of a miracle to them, reiteration may eventually convince them'.⁷¹ In spite of his dedicated endeavour, in 1922 malaria was still endemic and hookworm was rife.⁷² In the bleak words of one Medical Officer for Health in the 1950s: 'Hookworm, like the poor, is always with us'.⁷³ Keeping the population healthy had its economic benefit but Spurrier and many of his colleagues appear to have had a more genuine humanitarian concern for the well-being of the population.

The Education and Health Departments were keen in the late 1920s to collaborate with the Museum to spread medical propaganda to the masses, the bulk of whom were illiterate. Schools were viewed as key distribution channels, forming 'a link between literate schoolboys and illiterate adults'.⁷⁴ Museum cases with pictures and specimens were distributed to the districts for use in dispensaries and schools. Direct communication was preferable: 'the word spoken not by an unfamiliar and unconvincing European, who in any case is always suspect of ulterior motives, but by local persons who in homely vernacular can drive the facts home'.⁷⁵ It was hoped in the late 1920s that the graduates of the Teacher Training School, through training in the Museum and the biological laboratory, would disseminate this propaganda.

The first installation of the Public Health exhibit is visible in [Figure 4.15](#). It was organised using the model of those exhibits made by Sir Andrew Balfour for the Wellcome Medical Museum shown at the Wembley exhibition and later in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.⁷⁶ Balfour's explanatory display of diseases was revolutionary in the history of medical museums, which had previously housed a mass of specimens with little regard to non-specialist audiences. The key principles of Balfour's arrangements were the clear sequence of explaining 'aetiology, pathology, symptomatology, treatment and prevention' as well as the use of

many contextual photographs, models, diagrams and drawings.⁷⁷ Aders had worked under Dr Balfour at Khartoum and tried as far as possible to follow his principles in Zanzibar's 'modest display'.⁷⁸

It is clear from [Figure 4.15](#) that Spurrier and Aders were following this exhibition concept. For example, the tapeworm exhibit on the far wall shows the basic progression from diagnosis to treatment. Photographs and explanatory diagrams framed the specimens and models. Large graphic posters offered a simple narrative such as the stages of a malaria outbreak: 'Source of Infection; Carrier of Infection; Recipient of Infection'. Practical ways to improve nutrition and lifestyle were exhibited as well as specimens. Other displays included gigantic models of the rat flea, the house fly and mosquitoes along with their life cycles. In the early years, these giant-size insects were housed in the mammal section where 'towering among the diminutive rats the flea might well be styled "The Rat's Nightmare"' (see [Figure 4.11](#)).⁷⁹ During his overseas travels, Aders sent back many materials that were unavailable in Zanzibar.⁸⁰ Evelyn Waugh noted in the late 1920s the 'propagandist photographs of unvaccinated children suffering from smallpox'.⁸¹ The public health exhibits were eventually moved to the new extension building after 1930. Nicol Smith was able to improve and enhance these exhibits with the help of the Carnegie Grant in the 1930s. A large case was devoted to the mosquitoes of the Protectorate, and another to foods, including a diet chart inspired by an existing example from Singapore. Diseases in animals and preventative measures, such as cattle-dipping for East Coast fever, were illustrated through models.⁸²

Soon after her arrival in 1936, Nicol Smith attempted to make the scientific displays more accessible and relevant. She made non-technical labels for the cases, relating to the cause, effect and prophylaxis of mosquito-borne diseases, smallpox and plague.⁸³ She wanted to simplify the language used by her medically trained predecessors. That Nicol Smith was not a public health officer was at times an advantage. Conveying the scientific messages clearly in these cases required some skill. She organised for a series of photographs of the sources of diseases to be taken in Zanzibar as she believed that it 'drives the point home with greater poignancy if the place can be recognised'.⁸⁴ Models of breeding places were added and a native bed set up with a mosquito-net. The display was made 'simple, non-technical and bilingual'. She tried to make the nutrition section more specific to Zanzibar. The models of fruit, vegetables and milk showed 'the ingredients of a good diet, menus based on native dishes were drawn up to encourage the natives at least to vary their food, although the dietetic value of the dishes is unknown'.⁸⁵

Infant and maternal mortality was an area Nicol Smith resolved to

develop, as ‘Women form a large and constant part of the visitors to the Museum’. They were mostly illiterate and ‘pictures and models would be an invaluable means of enlightening them’.⁸⁶ In the new Infant Welfare and Maternity bay, two series of pictures were mounted with illustrations by two European artists living on the islands. One set showed ‘the wise mother attending the government hospital before, during and after delivery. The other represents that ideal home and the making of the good citizen’.⁸⁷ The attendants reported that they were much appreciated by visitors.⁸⁸ This response to shared concerns over infant welfare by local people and the colonial government was to present European ideals and values regarding home and parental responsibility, albeit rendered by the artists in Zanzibari settings.

New Resources and Media: the Library and the Cinema

The collections of books and journals were opened as a public reference library by Nicol Smith in 1937, in one small room in the Museum Annexe (Figure 5.4). A handbook of its collection was printed and distributed to schools and Government departments in 1937.⁸⁹ In its first year of opening, 421 readers used the library, of which most were non-European residents, chiefly teachers and older pupils.⁹⁰ Nicol Smith granted permission occasionally to borrow books. By 1939, the number using the library annually had reached 1,087. In 1940 she established a card system for readers although this was abolished in 1943 as it proved too hard to manage and failed to prevent the occasional theft of books. In 1941, money from the Spurrier Fund, set up for educational purposes in his will, was used to buy new cases for the library.

Figure 5.4 Readers in the Museum Library. TNA: CN 3/24/5.

Spurrier and Aders originally developed the Museum’s book collection, which therefore reflected their medical and zoological interests. It was augmented annually by purchases and donations of books about Zanzibar, history, archaeology, zoology and science. The library did not collect fiction. As a trained librarian, Cecil Thompson assessed it critically in the 1950s, describing it as:

... hybrid, or more correctly perhaps, a mongrel cross between a museum library and the normal British conception of a small municipal library, and on it has been grafted the beginnings of an official library of Government publications. From trying to be all three it has succeeded in being none effectively.⁹¹

The library suffered from a ‘particular incubus of obsolete medical and

veterinary text books and pamphlets'.⁹² In spite of these shortcomings and idiosyncrasies, significant numbers of adolescents and teachers used its resources in the 1930s and 1940s seeking any supplementary information for their studies in the absence of a public library system. Other libraries existed within community organisations but this was the only Government facility.⁹³ The varied and substantial collection in the English Club was not open to non-members.

In contrast to the library, which survived, the experiment with the cinema programme was ultimately doomed, but it represents a significant and overlooked chapter in the Museum's history.⁹⁴ By 1925, attending films was an established and popular recreation activity. The first cinema projection in Zanzibar took place in 1916 in the Victoria Gardens.⁹⁵ From the early 1920s onwards, cinema played an important role in the popular urban culture of Zanzibar. For example, in 1926, cinema attendances at the Royal Cinema numbered 2,672, of whom 50% were 'Natives', 46% Indians and 4% Arabs.⁹⁶ Most popular were the films produced in Hollywood and India, and later Egypt. The Protectorate Government from the start took an interest in controlling and censoring the programme, though in fact very few films were banned.⁹⁷ Waugh described the animated public at the cinema: 'unlike Aden, the audience was wide awake – mainly composed of natives, shrieking hysterically at the eccentricities of two drunken Americans'.⁹⁸ Rather than compare the Museum's film programme with the stories of adventure and romance shown in Zanzibar's mainstream cinemas, I will examine the films and their mediation in the context of the Museum's particular educational mission.

Film was used in several contexts in British colonial Africa as an educative medium held to be particularly useful for illiterate adult populations. The first such film was created in Kenya in 1924 by Dr A. R. Paterson, a 16 mm amateur reel to introduce and record a campaign against hookworm on the Kenya coast.⁹⁹ The medium henceforth became associated with public health education. Hanns Vischer, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, and the biologist Julian Huxley independently encouraged the Colonial Office to use film for public health and economic development in the late 1920s.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, the Colonial Secretary, L. S. Amery, established the Colonial Films Committee, and the production of films on health topics were undertaken experimentally in Nigeria from 1929 to 1931, and in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland during the Second World War.¹⁰¹

In 1930s sub-Saharan Africa, the greatest investment of time and money in educational films was the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), based in Vugiri in Tanganyika from 1935 to

1937.¹⁰² The Carnegie Corporation provided the majority of the funding and Lord Lugard chaired its advisory council. These films were the first to be entirely produced – shot, edited and projected – in Africa.¹⁰³ The advisory council insisted on the ‘Africanness’ of the films, seeking advice on the ground from local people about content and effectiveness, concurrently training assistants in production and projection. The broad aim was ‘to produce films of African life for educational purposes’.¹⁰⁴ These films addressed a variety of subjects: Western practices, such as the use of the post office, taxation, agricultural efficiency and disease prevention, as well as the depiction of traditional African stories. A lorry equipped to project the films in villages toured the region, travelling over 6,000 miles through Tanganyika, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Uganda.¹⁰⁵ Feedback from the audiences informed subsequent films. The films were widely distributed, used both humour and straight instruction, and elicited positive reactions from audiences, yet the funding was curtailed. Opinion was divided on the methodology, and Lord Dufferin, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary, preferred the cheaper method of colonial officers making their own films.¹⁰⁶ The recommendations at the end of the experiment by Major Notcutt, the experiment’s director, were incorporated into the new Colonial Film Units. In the long term, the principles of the experiment encouraged a more effective use of film and cinema with African audiences.

Characteristic of the idiosyncratic adoption of new technologies in Zanzibar, Aders’s enthusiasm drove the use of cinema in the 1920s. In his letters, he badgered Spurrier when on leave in Britain to acquire technical equipment. Having proved the value of lantern slide lectures in his small museum in the Public Health Office, Aders was now convinced of the need for an epidiascope and a film projector. The former device could project any object onto a screen, without needing to create slides – these were costly items, estimated at £50 each, which together was equivalent to one third of the staff salary budget.¹⁰⁷ In the late 1920s, they relied on a borrowed film projector although Aders wrote frequently to hasten the acquisition of the Museum’s own equipment. By 1928 a projector had been secured and the Museum was ready to exploit Zanzibar’s existing enthusiasm for the moving image.¹⁰⁸

Tantalisingly, Aders’s letters do not describe the precise content of the films, though they do explain the way in which they were presented. Prior to their public showings, the educational films were watched by the sanitary inspectors and the mosquito searchers, as Aders planned for these men to sit among the audience and explain the subject directly.¹⁰⁹ The educational show was followed by a Charlie Chaplin film.¹¹⁰ In this way, the viewers ‘can much more

easily grasp the subject and Charlie Chaplin comes in to break the ennui'.¹¹¹ As in any teaching scenario, understanding the audiences and the necessary incentives were vital to its success. This description also shows the intervention necessary to make the available films comprehensible. After some experiments Aders decided that 'I am off Kinemas – too complicated and expensive for our present needs' but he continued to press the Museum's need for slides and an epidiascope.¹¹² After Aders's death in 1932, film was nonetheless included by McElderry in the Carnegie Grant proposal in 1934–35.

Nicol Smith shared an interest in developing the use of film in education in Africa and visited the BEKE in 1937. With the experiment due to end in May 1937, she was keen to apply the scheme's research to the Museum. Educational films became part of the regular Museum programme in 1939. These were shown to schools, women's groups and 'miscellaneous native children' in a darkened section of the extension (Figure 5.5).¹¹³ Nicol Smith acquired new films distributed by the British Film Institute, including 'the Life Cycle of a plant', 'Amazing Maize', 'Our wonderful body', 'the Flea, Bug and Louse' and 'London River'.¹¹⁴ Public health topics dominated the selection but the inclusion of 'London River' suggests a place for films that bound Zanzibar to the sights and sounds of the British imperial centre and its dispersed community.

Figure 5.5 Film projection in the Museum Annexe by Mzee Khamisi. TNA: CN 3/24/11.

Watching 'Amazing Maize' brings home the striking limitations of these films as education resources. This eight-minute sequence from 1933 about the life-cycle of maize or 'Indian corn', explains the growth, pollination and fertilisation of the plant.¹¹⁵ The majority of the film depicts the side-view of the plant growing in an empty studio, with time-lapse film to speed up the process. A jaunty soundtrack enlivens the story. The original is voiced in the characteristically clipped tones of a British Pathé announcer of the 1930s and the content of the narration is heavily scientific. Presenting to an audience unfamiliar with the science of plant reproduction or the use of microscopes would require careful contextualisation and explanation throughout. The virtual absence of practical information about growing maize is particularly conspicuous.

Teachers were enthusiastic about the films and audiences were reportedly diverted, although Nicol Smith admitted that it was impossible as yet to 'gauge the educational effect on the visitors'. She reported receiving criticism over the Museum cinema programme 'owing to the difficulty in obtaining suitable films'.¹¹⁶ Notcutt believed that any form of film was valued by his audiences in the rural East African villages though the urban Zanzibaris might have

been more sceptical.¹¹⁷ Nicol Smith felt that there were a sufficient number of town-dwellers 'whose education is sufficiently advanced to justify the service'.¹¹⁸ There was an 'unavoidable foreign element' but when commentating she was able to use this as an advantage by explaining the contrasts and 'the contrary attracts'.¹¹⁹

Nicol Smith described her techniques of mediation of film in a letter of 1940 to Clark, curator in the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, who sought her advice on this new technology. By this stage she had two Bolex film projectors, one for use from the mains supply and another powered by a generator for use on trips. She had found silent films most appropriate 'for Africa because it leaves you free to adapt your commentary'.¹²⁰ She described her struggle to obtain suitable films and her efforts to find those that 'appeal to the native mind', admitting that 'Our knowledge of this is still very much in the stage of trial and error'. She explained that she showed two types of films. With schools she used ordinary documentary films, familiar in Britain, and focusing upon biology, geography and manufacturing processes. These were prohibitively expensive to obtain in bulk and she continually pleaded with the Protectorate Government to recommend that an East African film library service be set up. She then used films made in Africa with African actors for the 'less educated and illiterate African', presumably the BEKE films. She reported that these films provoked great laughs from the audience. In contrast to 'Amazing Maize', these had a clear narrative and practical advice, featuring Africans in a local context.¹²¹

She herself made two films in 1938. These were somewhat prosaically entitled: 'The Work at the Women's Outpatient Department' and 'Agricultural Methods at the Experimental Station of the Agricultural Department' filmed at Kizimbani.¹²² While these were likely to be amateur and limited in production expertise, we should recognise Nicol Smith's determination to bring such a proposal to fruition.

Use of film in the Museum grew rapidly in 1940. This popularity can be attributed to the wider selection of films available via the British Council in Dar es Salaam. British war propaganda films were also shown regularly, obtained through Nicol Smith's part-time role as Assistant Information Officer. The expansion of the service was due to a large extent to the training of Mzee Khamisi, the attendant who took responsibility for the cinema. He chose the programme, controlled the crowd and supported the commentary (Figure 5.5). He oversaw 70 performances in a three-month period.¹²³ Nicol Smith introduced a Saturday morning viewing for any children who wished to come along.¹²⁴ The film service was particularly praised by Cox of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, in his

commendation of her work in 1940.¹²⁵

After Nicol Smith's departure, Robertson, her part-time successor, decided the cinema showings in the Museum were a safety hazard. In Nicol Smith's time, films were shown to 90 children at a time in one wing of the Annexe, closed off with heavy curtains and no ventilation. Robertson and the Committee were concerned that the purpose of the Carnegie film service had become confused with Nicol Smith's work as Information Officer for war propaganda. Without safe viewing facilities and a sufficiently wide range of films, Robertson recommended selling the apparatus to the Information Office who were using it anyway and returning the funds to the Carnegie Corporation. His somewhat depressing conclusion was: 'The scheme was a good one, but was far in advance of its time'.¹²⁶ Without dedicated personnel it was unfeasible to continue but the early results and response suggest the film programme had real impact when driven by a committed individual.

Taking Education beyond the Museum

In the 1920s, the first attempts to take the Museum's work beyond Zanzibar Town and reach out to rural communities took place. One example of such an expedition was recorded in the *Gazette* in 1928. The first Jeanes teacher in Zanzibar, whose name is not recorded in the article, was trained at the Museum in malaria and hookworm, before delivering trial lectures in the Government School hall to large audiences. He subsequently travelled around the villages with lantern slides and an assistant, and attracted large crowds 'on foot or on donkey-back from the whole countryside'.¹²⁷ His first lecture took place:

... in the open air, under the starlit dome of the night and the waving palm trees – a perfect setting! Seated on the ground and on benches provided by the school, a large and appreciative audience followed the lecturer with unflagging interest from the beginning to end as he skilfully showed them by word and picture how to combat and overcome one of their greatest enemies.¹²⁸

On one occasion in 1928, the lecture finished with a gramophone playing records of local songs, this created 'a pleasing and highly popular diversion'.¹²⁹ On a rainy outing in Ndjijani in December 1928, the audience still exceeded 300.¹³⁰ It was hoped that this mode of education would not only improve living conditions, 'but also [...] impart interest to their somewhat humdrum existence'.¹³¹ The Jeanes teacher's work expanded in subsequent years. In 1929, he visited every school in Zanzibar, albeit briefly, and through the Museum and the Public Health department took sets of slides on malaria,

hookworm, leprosy, plague and bilharzia to the villages, where he drew crowds of over 200.¹³²

Hollis believed that a vital factor in the Jeanes teacher's appeal to audiences was that he was a local person.¹³³ The new scheme was felt to be 'pregnant with possibilities', especially as it reached adults as well as children.¹³⁴ In 1929, a graduate of the Teacher Training School accompanied the Jeanes teacher to share lecturing duties when extending the scheme to Pemba.¹³⁵ Money was secured from the Carnegie Corporation for a Jeanes Teacher Training school in the 1930s, but it had to be returned after a small-scale anthropological survey revealed suspicion by the Muslim population about a scheme resting on Christian values.¹³⁶ Spurrier, Aders and McElderry were inspired by this method of teaching in rural areas and these ideas coalesced as part of the Museum's successful application to the Carnegie Corporation in 1935.

Exhibits also travelled around the island on loan to Government departments and schools. In one example in 1936, Museum materials were loaned to the Health Office for two exhibitions in villages. The package included photographs, diagrams and models relating to the advantages of vaccination and information about local diseases. A stall dealing with nutrition, dietary recommendations and 'a good and a bad Swahili kitchen' was manned by Nicol Smith, aided by several European ladies. Further propaganda included a short play, pamphlets and posters on the feeding of young children and the need to bring sick children to the hospital for treatment.¹³⁷ The Medical Officer for Health estimated that around 12,000 people attended in total and over 15,000 leaflets were distributed.¹³⁸ Special events in rural areas certainly attracted many people but were so rare that attendance cannot be equated to the adoption of the suggested practices. On these occasions, the Government department provided expertise and coordination while the Museum was simply treated as a permanent space for display and storage. This was a potentially dangerous precedent in discussions over the curatorial role.

Nicol Smith's proposal in 1937 to expand the use of film for public health instruction to the villages met with initial scepticism; such activities were not considered a natural focus for a museum. Even Markham of the MA, who had encouraged the application, himself questioned if this fitted the criterion of 'museum activities'.¹³⁹ In her report to the MA for 1937, Nicol Smith stressed the appropriateness of educational films in and beyond the Museum.¹⁴⁰ She envisaged the Museum as 'auxiliary to the Medical, Agriculture and Education Departments in their schemes for training and propaganda ... it would pioneer work in East Africa where the need for educational films is often mentioned, but, with the exception of the Bantu Educational

Cinema Experiment, not yet realised'.¹⁴¹ Nicol Smith met with Markham during her leave in London in 1938 and discussed in particular the second tranche of Carnegie funding.¹⁴²

Upon confirmation of the second part of the grant in 1939, Nicol Smith continued to develop her ideas for an exhibition van for projecting films and plans for how the rural and travelling Pemba service would be organised. However, the spending of this second grant of £500 was fiercely debated. It crystallised many of the lingering questions over who was responsible for health and medical education, in particular since the recent creation of the Social Welfare Committee. A series of joint meetings of the Social Welfare Committee and the Museum Committee from December 1938 and January 1939 demonstrated the fundamental divergence of opinion over method of education. The Director of Agriculture and the Provincial Commissioner both believed that the 'present standard of intelligence of the native audiences ... was so low' that the benefit for presenting films in the villages would be minimal.¹⁴³ The former also felt the proposal was nebulous and 'hastily prepared'. The travelling scheme was voted down by four votes to three. Notably, Hollingsworth, one of the longest serving residents and the most experienced educationalist, was in favour and clearly believed Zanzibari people were readily able to absorb the information.

An alternative suggestion was to spend the Carnegie money on dioramas of health and agricultural exhibits. Dioramas were favoured as, according to members of the Museum Committee 'the African learns readily from practical example'.¹⁴⁴ The reconfigured proposal sent to the Trustees of the Empire Grant at the MA in 1939 recommended four areas for expenditure: photographs for training in agriculture; physiological and anatomical models for small group instruction in the Museum; two dioramas – one to illustrate hookworm prevention and the other infant welfare – advice on which would be sought from the Imperial Institute; and a trailer to be fitted to a car.¹⁴⁵ None of these plans materialised. The Carnegie funds were first returned in 1940, then made available once again after the extension of Nicol Smith's contract. However, after her resignation, spending the money according to the terms of the grant increasingly placed a burden upon the Museum and the unspent funds were finally returned. In the absence of a full-time curator, the Museum's outreach work ground to a halt.

The Impact of the Museum

Measuring the impact of museums upon visitors is a notoriously challenging, even impossible, task.¹⁴⁶ Numbers can be counted but

levels of engagement are difficult to quantify. Visitor figures are the simplest evidence in the official records but one must look beyond these to seek commentary on the use and reception of the Museum. These assessments are also subjective. Nicol Smith and those within the Museum looked positively on reactions of the local visitors to help assert the importance of their activities to the community; her colleagues in other departments had a more inherently cynical view of the capacity of ‘Africans’ to engage with the Museum.

While thousands of visitors flocked to the opening, the daily use of the Museum can be reconstructed approximately through the recorded numbers. [Table 5.1](#) shows the inconsistency in the recording of visitor figures and the categories. The method of counting visitors was approximate due to the absence of tickets. Overall the impression is of a regular and consistent number of visitors. No note is made of a struggle to attract audiences, although expectations of the curators are hard to discern. Until Thompson arrived in the 1950s and introduced a formal counting system, these were estimates, and he suspected underestimates.¹⁴⁷

The earliest visitor numbers located so far are for 1928, where the monthly record is given as 3,000–5,000 visitors.¹⁴⁸ The most detailed visitor figures are available for the second half of 1935, where a monthly breakdown was recorded. These counts may have been made for McElderry’s application for the Carnegie fund. That year, the total number of visits ranged between 2,027 in November to 2,847 in the month of September.¹⁴⁹ More precise numbers were recorded from those who signed the Visitors’ Book in the main Museum, but Nicol Smith’s reports indicate that these in the main were the European, Indian or Arab visitors. Members of other communities tended only to visit the Annexe with the natural history exhibits and therefore did not sign the book. It is clear that the numbers in the 1930s were lower than the estimates from the 1920s but remained steady. The lack of data for those who did not sign the Visitor’s Book in the main Museum during Nicol Smith’s period of tenure skews the numbers in [Table 5.1](#), and one can infer that the number was similar to that of 1944 – though even this figure was an approximation. In an island population of 200,000, the annual number of visitors suggested here is significant, as the number of tourists would have only constituted a fraction of the total. By way of comparison, in 1935 the report for the Coryndon Memorial Museum in Nairobi stated that during that year it was visited by 2,200 adult visitors and 600 schoolchildren.¹⁵⁰

Table 5.1 Visitor Figures 1935–1945

Sources: Annual Reports of the Zanzibar Museum, 1936–1945, and other official reports in Zanzibar Archives.

Numbers involved in specific education programmes rose rapidly during Nicol Smith's time, and for several years the Museum was at full teaching capacity. Some teachers were particularly dedicated: the pupils of the Rural Middle School at Dole, where Abdulrahman taught, walked 14 kilometres to visit in 1937. In 1939, classes from the Euan Smith Madrassa visited on 26 occasions bringing 750 students in total. The film service was particularly popular and probably accounts for the rapid increase in numbers attending educational activities. The *Samachar* reported in 1937 that people thronged to the Museum and had to be turned away from film screenings.¹⁵¹ The number of readers in the Library rose to 1,437 in 1940.

These numbers tell only part of the story. The kinds of visitors and their motivations for visiting must be discerned from sporadic references. Overall, they support Nicol Smith's claim that 'Visitors are many, of both sexes and of all races and ages'.¹⁵² In his memorandum of the early 1930s, McElderry categorised visitors who came as individuals, rather than as part of an institutional group, into four groups. The first and smallest group were scientists visiting the Protectorate, including several notable names, anthropologists and other academics.

The second category was foreign tourists, usually European and American. They would have been at sea for several months and arrive 'usually surfeited with sight-seeing and only want to be driven into the country and to see a clove-tree'. To serve this purpose, six clove trees were planted between the Museum and the Annexe. So short was their stay that a Museum visit was an ideal way to absorb the essence of Zanzibar. Most, like Eslanda Goode Robeson, hired a car and guide and immediately headed to the Museum during their short stopover.¹⁵³

Adult residents of Zanzibar formed the third category and, according to McElderry, visited 'when helping visiting friends to see Zanzibar'.¹⁵⁴ This group also used the Library and Museum when they were making 'a special study of something'. The final group were adolescents and children and McElderry felt strongly that:

The young are the hope of the Museum. Their attention is arrested by things which have not been staled by too long a familiarity and they are more easily receptive of instruction. A good many children come 'on their own' specially parties of youths from distant places. Often one of them will begin to tell others what they are looking at: so long as this is correct it can be allowed.¹⁵⁵

Such a description suggests a thirst for knowledge and diversion amongst the young people of Zanzibar.

Numbers and types of visitors can be approximated by eye but the

impact of the Museum upon them can only be inferred.¹⁵⁶ The place of the Museum must not be overstated. It can be considered as one of a number of cultural, recreational and educational opportunities in the interwar period. During this time in Zanzibar, the urban youth enjoyed varied social activities, including football and cinema. Through these pastimes, they encountered cultural influences from a variety of places, including mainland East and West Africa, India, Egypt, Europe and America.¹⁵⁷ The newly educated young women, as well as studying history in schools, were also exposed to modern fashion in magazines and newspapers.¹⁵⁸ While the ponderous scientific films that the Museum showed in the late 1930s could not compete with the action films from India and Hollywood, spectators regularly attended. 'Unhooking the hookworm', a film originally made by the Rockefeller Foundation for rural southern communities in the United States, played in the Museum and continued in Zanzibar's cinemas from 1928 until the 1950s.¹⁵⁹ The persistence of the disease meant that all measures were used. Whether or not they were appreciated, there was an enduring use for and attendance of the Museum film screenings.

Other modes of participation, such as the donations of exhibits, testify to a broader appreciation of the Museum's purpose. The fact that a suggestion to dedicate the Museum to Sir Claud Hollis was rejected by the public suggests that there was a perceived notion of public ownership of the building; they had provided much of the funding, of course.¹⁶⁰ Donations for the proposed extension in the late 1920s were also forthcoming, suggesting that people were not disappointed with the new institution.

Nicol Smith herself tried to find evidence of the impact of her teaching sessions:

I cannot gauge the actual educational value of these school visits. All I can say is that the stimulation and response are there. A class of schoolgirls who attended a series of demonstrations on local history are said to have excelled in that subject.¹⁶¹

She believed the town population made 'constant use of it and its small library, it gives encouragement and assistance to the intellectual interest of the rising generation which has already shown ability to produce scientific papers' – a likely reference to Abdulrahman.¹⁶² On her departure she stressed the need 'to carry on the educational activities of the Museum, otherwise an aspect which has added so much life to it and is appreciated by the local population in town and country will be lost'.¹⁶³ This plea fell on deaf ears.

It is worth at this stage mentioning once more the Zanzibar Arts and Crafts Society, founded in the early 1940s to exhibit works by

local artists and spearheaded by members of the Indian community. It provides an interesting example of an alternative and popular cultural activity. Nicol Smith conceived the Society but after disagreements over the judging of the exhibition the Society's Committee split away from the Museum.¹⁶⁴ An exhibition was held every two to three years from 1942 in various venues, including the Zanzibar Chamber of Commerce and the Government School Hall, with particular support from Eric Dutton, then Chief Secretary. His friend and colleague Ajit Singh was involved in the Society, as were many prominent Indians, Europeans and Arabs.¹⁶⁵ The exhibited works used various media, including paintings (oils and watercolours), pastels and needlework. In 1948, John Sinclair's original plans for the Peace Memorial Hall were displayed in the Society's exhibition.¹⁶⁶ From 1945, the Government formed a small committee with a modest sum of money to purchase items from these exhibitions 'with a view to fostering the best forms of creative art in Zanzibar and to encouraging the production of works of merit'.¹⁶⁷ Funds for the prizes were taken from the Museum charge. Questions arose in the late 1940s over where to display the items purchased; the Museum was suggested though it is not clear if this ever took place. The Society developed a library and held lectures and evening classes, and in the late 1940s began to look for a permanent location. The archive records cease in 1952 and the correspondence ends at the failure by the Government to offer a satisfactory space for the Society to lease.

It is significant that this Society thrived and its classes and lectures continued while the Museum struggled in the absence of a full-time curator. There was a demonstrable interest and appetite amongst the Indian community for cultural and educational activities at a time when the Museum Committee was still dominated by British Government officers. The two bodies were of course not mutually exclusive; Ajit Singh and Sir John Gray were involved in both initiatives, but separation early in the Society's history meant that contemporary art and craft activities were not a part of the Museum's programme, counter to its founders' wishes.

In a less positive assessment of impact, the Museum was evidently seen as a 'house of treasures' and was intermittently the target of theft throughout its existence. Within two months of its opening, all the military and political orders on display, Sultan Barghash's whip handle and all the notes and coins had been stolen.¹⁶⁸ It was only after this that an *askari* (guard) was placed on site overnight. Prior to the establishment of the Museum, all such objects would have been kept in private residences, most of which were guarded. Bringing these objects into the public domain placed them in immediate danger. Thefts occurred in the Museum on a regular basis, including

an extremely inept attempt by a drunken British soldier in 1962 who was caught trying to break through a window with a hoe.¹⁶⁹

Another way to 'measure' the impact of the Museum is to consider the influence of public health education. Disease was still rife in the 1940s, but conditions were improving. We have seen that the Director of the Medical Department believed local sanitary officers carried out the most effective education and that any advice given by the British was automatically ignored. The irregularity of provision in the rural districts, however, meant that the Museum provided services to communities the Medical Department rarely reached. Nicol Smith continued to be struck by how much the Museum was 'appreciated by the local people ... even from the most "untouched" villages and Pemba and respond to any rural activity by it'.¹⁷⁰ As there were so few activities that reached Pemba, and in the absence of regular interest by the Government, it is unsurprising Museum events were well attended.

Education lay at the heart of the Zanzibar Museum's existence. The curators experimented with a wide range of media for teaching the largely illiterate population, and to support the academic activities of the schools. According to the Museum reports, urban and rural communities responded enthusiastically. Diversion and novelty may account for some of this popularity but the audience figures remained at a steady level while a full-time curator was employed. Nicol Smith persevered in making the programme appropriate, and more crucially, relevant, according to her understanding of local people's needs. Her ambition was to 'make concrete ... a puzzling new world' to the local audience.¹⁷¹ The expansion into teaching subjects beyond the normal historical preserves of a museum attracted debate, but she maintained that they fulfilled the mission of the Museum. The popularity of the library attested to the desire for self-improvement amongst Zanzibar's population. Taking account of these multiple educational contexts, it is clear that the Museum had an impact on varied members of Zanzibar's communities.

A greater challenge lay in convincing fellow colonial officers of the power of teaching through the Museum. This work was entirely dependent upon the efforts of the individual. During the hiatus between the two curators, and during Nicol Smith's absence in 1938, education sessions practically ceased. They also dropped off considerably after her resignation in 1942. The Government admitted at the time that a dedicated museum educator was essential to the

maintenance of the Museum's programme and accepted that the educational activities might flounder.¹⁷²

Within the wider context of education and museums in the British Empire, the activities of the Zanzibar Museum ran counter to the accepted chronology. Spurrier embedded the approach of active engagement in the Museum in the 1920s, at a time when such programmes fell by the wayside in several museums in Britain after the peak of activity during the First World War. Nicol Smith sought to sustain this spirit and continue the broad-ranging education curriculum, in spite of her lack of training in medical and health matters.

Perspectives on the role and implementation of colonial policy had shifted immeasurably since the 1910s when Spurrier and Aders developed the first public health museum. The curators of the 1920s were allowed much greater independence and were able to follow their instincts about the needs of the Protectorate's population. Spurrier was judged by his colleagues, through his age and acquaintance with local communities, to be well informed. In the 1930s, Nicol Smith found herself at the intersection of Governmental debates over welfare, education and social development. Yet she lacked any qualification in this field and could only reassert how effective her practice appeared to be. It is an unusual case in the British Empire of a museum being so closely involved in discussions about how to implement these contested social policies.

The public health exhibits lingered in the Museum until 1957, when Thompson finally removed them to make way for other exhibits. He wrote:

They could never have been inspiring. Although their removal is a break with part of the original policy of the Museum, for health education was one of the main aims of its founders, it is felt that instruction in hygiene is today best left to the health authorities and the schools of Zanzibar, and that in any case these exhibits had long since served their purpose.¹⁷³

Spurrier's successful experimentation in education and film in the 1920s created an anomaly in the 1930s. The old film projector can still be seen in the stores of the House of Wonders, along with the ageing celluloid films, the only material remnant of this hitherto forgotten era. The prominence of the Museum's programme and prolific activity prompted questions over its value and validity. In the educational arena, it seems the Museum was a victim of its own success.

- 1 Elsaada Goode Robeson, *African Journey* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1945), 92.
- 2 Henry Alex Miers and S. F. Markham, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of British Africa* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1932), 58. This Carnegie-sponsored survey brought museums in British Africa into an imperial museum community. See Elda Grobler and Fransjohan Pretorius, 'The British Museums Association, the Carnegie Corporation and Museums in South Africa, 1932–1938: An Overview', *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif Vir Kultuureskiedenis* 22, no. 2 (November 2008): 45–65.
- 3 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1924, 1 December 1928, 340.
- 4 Joanna Lewis discusses the development of Colonial Office 'native welfare' policy in Africa in the interwar period, particularly the contradiction between the need for greater state intervention to achieve these ends and the prevalent doctrine of indirect rule: Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya 1925–52* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 21–81.
- 5 Miers and Markham, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of British Africa*, 58.
- 6 ZNA: DF 9/1, McElderry, Memorandum, 26 June 1935.
- 7 The significant literature on education in Africa between the wars includes contemporary critiques and evaluation, as well as historical analyses. Of the secondary material of particular note here are T. O. Ranger, 'African Attempts to Control Education in East and Central Africa 1900–1939', *Past & Present*, 32, no. 2 (December 1965): 57–85; Ann Beck, 'Colonial Policy and Education in British East Africa, 1900–1950', *Journal of British Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 1966): 115–38; Clive Whitehead, 'Education in British Colonial Dependencies, 1919–39: A Re-Appraisal', *Comparative Education* 17 (March 1981): 71–80; J. A. Mangan, ed., *'Benefits Bestowed': Education and British Imperialism*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*; Bob W. White, 'Talk about School: Education and the Colonial Project in French and British Africa, (1860–1960)', *Comparative Education* 32, no. 1 (March 1996): 9–25; Lewis, *Empire State-Building*; Peter Kallaway, 'Welfare and Education in British Colonial Africa and South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s', *Paedagogica Historica* 41 (June 2005): 337–56; Aaron Windel, 'British Colonial Education in Africa: Policy and Practice in the Era of Trusteeship', *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (January 2009): 1–21. Several scholars have investigated the origins of development and welfare policies, identifying continuities between colonial education policies and contemporary international development strategy: Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 2; Rosaleen Smyth, 'The Roots of Community Development in Colonial Office Policy and Practice in Africa', *Social Policy & Administration* 38, no. 4 (August 2004): 419; Michael Ashley Havinden and David Meredith, eds, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies, 1850–1960* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870 – 1950* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- 8 Kallaway, 'Welfare and Education', 354.
- 9 Windel, 'British Colonial Education in Africa', 2; Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 145, 148; William Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).
- 10 Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 24–5.
- 11 Quoted in Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and Trusteeship in the colonial empire', 269.
- 12 Windel, 'British Colonial Education in Africa', 6.
- 13 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 53.
- 14 Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical African Dependencies, *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*, Cmd 2374 (London: H.M.S.O., 1925), 4.
- 15 Thomas Jesse Jones undertook a survey for the Phelps Stokes Corporation in order to apply the theory of adapted education: T. J. Jones, *Education in East Africa: A Study of East, Central and South Africa* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1925), 7–45; Kallaway, 'Welfare and Education', 345.
- 16 Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 54.
- 17 From 1919 to 1940 the Colonial Office spent more money on the mandate of Iraq than the tropical African territories: Windel, 'British Colonial Education in Africa', 10.
- 18 The mission schools in Zanzibar catered mainly to former slaves and immigrants from the mainland; the local Muslim population had resisted attempts at conversion: Jones, *Education in East Africa*, 226.

19 Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 59; Norman Leys, *Kenya* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924); Norman Leys, *A Last Chance in Kenya* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).

20 Clive Whitehead, 'British Colonial Educational Policy: A Synonym for Cultural Imperialism?', in *'Benefits Bestowed': Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 211–30. Kallaway offers an alternative perspective, arguing that this type of education 'addresses the real-life prospects and context of the majority of people who lived in the rural areas': Kallaway, 'Welfare and Education', 344.

21 See Kallaway, 'Welfare and Education'.

22 Shaaban Saleh Farsi, an Arab teacher in the 1930s and 40s, dates the earliest to ten centuries ago: Shaaban Saleh Farsi, *Zanzibar: Historical Accounts* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1980), 10. For a comprehensive analysis of Islamic education in Zanzibar, see Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*.

23 Arthur Mayhew, 'A Comparative Survey of Educational Aims and Methods in British India and British Tropical Africa', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 6, no. 2 (April 1933): 172–86.

24 Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 224.

25 Jones observed in the 1920s that: 'The wealth of human interest which surrounds Zanzibar is equalled by the complexity of the educational problems of the Protectorate. Both are out of all proportion to the area or the population involved'. Jones, *Education in East Africa*, 219.

26 William Hendry, 'Some Aspects of Education in Zanzibar', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 27, no. 108 (July 1928): 342.

27 Ibid., 344.

28 Numbers in the 1910s fluctuated. One report recorded 632 students across the 6 schools (one in Zanzibar Town, 5 in districts) in 1913; in 1917 there were 8 schools with the Government Central School the largest: Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 273–4.

29 Hendry, 'Some Aspects of Education in Zanzibar', 345.

30 Ibid., 346.

31 Ibid., 351.

32 Ibid.

33 ZNA: BA 18/11, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1922, 121.

34 Hendry, 'Some Aspects of Education in Zanzibar', 343.

35 Corrie Decker, 'Reading, Writing, and Respectability: How Schoolgirls Developed Modern Literacies in Colonial Zanzibar', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 89–114.

36 Hendry, 'Some Aspects of Education in Zanzibar', 352.

37 Decker, 'Reading, Writing and Respectability', 94.

38 Ibid., 95.

39 Ibid., 89.

40 Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 300–338.

41 ZNA: NW 4/2, *Al-Falaq*, Vol. 6, No. 363, 29 July 1939.

42 ZNA: NW 14/4, *Samachar*. Vol. 34, No. 45, 14 March 1937, 8.

43 Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 154; Herle, 'The Life-Histories of Objects', 98–100; Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*, 12.

44 Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War*, 19.

45 E. Howarth, 'Presidential Address', *Museums Journal* 13 (1913): 42.

46 Gaynor Kavanagh, 'The First World War and Its Implications for Education in British Museums', *History of Education: The Journal of the History of Education Society* 17, no. 2 (1988): 166.

47 Cited in Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War*, 48.

48 Ibid., 14.

49 MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire*, 4.

50 Jones, *Education in East Africa*, 40.

51 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1939* (Zanzibar: Government

Printer, 1940), 1. Louis Leakey later echoed this sentiment, noting at the 1957 Conference of Museum Curators of East Africa that actual objects, rather than photographs and drawings, were powerful teaching tools with 'African and many Asian school children'. AB 41/23 Minutes of the Conference of Museum Curators of East Africa 1957, 2.

52 Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', 106.

53 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1939, 1.

54 Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', 106.

55 ZNA: CA 1/3, Hollingsworth to Spurrier, 18 November 1925.

56 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1936* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1937), 7.

57 Decker, 'Reading, Writing, and Respectability', 97.

58 ZNA: BA 18/19, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1928, 44, 51.

59 Ibid., 44.

60 ZNA: AB 41/1, Museum Committee to British Resident, 14 May 1926.

61 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1936, 6.

62 ZNA: CA 1/4, Aders to Spurrier, 19 July 1926.

63 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1936, 7.

64 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1924, 1 December 1928, 340.

65 ZNA: CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 4 August 1928.

66 TNA: CO 618/76/15, Report on the use made of the Carnegie Grant to the Zanzibar Museum in 1939, 3.

67 ZNA: CA 1/3, 'In Memoriam' booklet, 1935, 5.

68 ZNA: BA 18/11, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1922, 121–2.

69 ZNA: BA 18/19, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1928, 48.

70 Ibid.

71 ZNA: BA 18/11, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1922, 69.

72 Ibid., 34, 60.

73 RHL: MSS. Afr. r. 68, R. J. K. Tallack, 'Aspects of the Public Health of the Zanzibar Protectorate' (unpublished MSc thesis, University of Oxford, 1954), 60.

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75 Ibid.

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77 Sidney Herbert Daukes, *The Medical Museum: Modern Developments, Organisation and Technical Methods Based on a New System of Visual Teaching* (London: Wellcome Foundation, 1929), 28.

78 ZNA: DF 9/1, McElderry, Memorandum, 26 June 1935.

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80 ZNA: CA 1/7, Aders to Spurrier, 22 November 1929.

81 Waugh, *Remote People*, 169.

82 Ibid.

83 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1936, 5.

84 Ibid., 10.

85 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1937* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1938), 4.

86 ZNA: DF 9/13, Report of 1936 to Empire Secretary of the Museums Association, April 1937.

87 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1939, 7.

88 Ibid., 6.

89 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1936, 7.

90 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum*, 1937, 4.

91 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum (Beit-el-Amani) 1956* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1957), 26.

92 Ibid., 26.

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- 94 For discussion of the representation of Africa in films projected in Britain, see Emma Sandon, 'Projecting Africa: Two British Travel Films of the 1920s', in *Cultural Encounters, Representing Otherness*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street (London: Routledge, 2000), 108–48.
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- 96 Brigitte Reinwald, "'Tonight at the Empire?'" Cinema and Urbanity in Zanzibar, 1920s to 1960s', *Afrique & Histoire* 5, no. 1 (2006): 92.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 98 Waugh, *Remote People*, 162.
- 99 Smyth, 'The Roots of Community Development', 424.
- 100 Quoted in Rosaleen Smyth, 'The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927–1939', *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (January 1979): 440.
- 101 Megan Vaughan has analysed in depth two films on venereal disease shown in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 180–99.
- 102 Notcutt wrote a vivid account of this project with detailed practical advice for creating films in Africa: L. A. Notcutt and G. C. Latham, *The African and the Cinema: An Account of the Work of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment during the Period March 1935 to May 1937* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1937).
- 103 Manthia Diawara, 'Sub-Saharan African Film Production: Technological Paternalism', *Jump Cut* 32 (April 1987): 61–65.
- 104 'Native Africa and the Cinema', *Nature* 141 (21 May 1938): 932 described an experiment in 1938 by the BEKE on the history of the Wasamba tribe through close collaboration with the community.
- 105 Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema*, 74–98, 122.
- 106 Smyth, 'The Roots of Community Development', 427.
- 107 ZNA: AB 41/1, Museum Committee to British Resident, 9 August 1926.
- 108 Reinwald, "'Tonight at the Empire?'"', 105.
- 109 ZNA: CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 21 July 1928.
- 110 ZNA: CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 4 August 1928.
- 111 ZNA: CA 1/6, de Souza to Spurrier, 11 November 1928.
- 112 ZNA: CA 1/6, Aders to Spurrier, 20 September 1928.
- 113 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1939*, 3.
- 114 ZNA: DF 9/13, Carnegie Grant Accounts for 1937.
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- 116 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1939*, 6.
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- 119 *Ibid.*
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- 123 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942.
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- 127 ZNA: BA 18/19, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1928, 47.
- 128 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1912, 8 September 1928, 244.
- 129 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1914, 22 September 1928, 258.
- 130 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1925, 8 December 1928, 346.
- 131 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1921, 3 November 1928, 314.
- 132 ZNA: BA 18/20, Zanzibar Government Administrative Reports for 1929, 114–5.
- 133 Speech to Legislative Council reported in *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1924, 1 December

- 1928, 337.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1949, 11 May 1929, 127.
- 136 For Wilson's personal account of this survey, see RCSL: RCMS 162/1/1: Wilson, 'An Agriculturalist in East Africa 133– 1964', 47–59. For the official report, see TNA: CO 618/73/3, Report of the Commission Appointed to Investigate Rural Education in Zanzibar Protectorate, 1939.
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- 138 ZNA: DF 9/13, Report of 1936 to Empire Secretary of the Museums Association, April 1937.
- 139 ZNA: DF 9/13, Markham to Nicol Smith, 17 August 1937.
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- 141 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum, 1937*, 8.
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- 150 Kenya National Archives (KNA hereafter): NM/1/469, Minutes of the Coryndon Memorial Trustees Meetings, East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society, Annual Report and Balance Sheet 1935, 8.
- 151 ZNA: NW 14/4, *Samachar*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 23 May 1937, 2B.
- 152 Ailsa Nicol Smith, 'A Museum in East Africa: A Pictorial Description of Some of the Activities of the Peace Memorial Museum, Zanzibar', *Museums Journal* 40, no. 12 (March 1941): 317.
- 153 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum Report, 1956*, 24.
- 154 ZNA: DF 9/1, McElderry, Memorandum, 26 June 1935.
- 155 Ibid.
- 156 Claire Wintle has used ethnographic representations within popular theatre to assess impact of museum displays: Wintle, 'Visiting the Empire at the Provincial Museum'.
- 157 Laura Fair, 'Kickin' It: Leisure, Politics and Football in Colonial Zanzibar, 1900s – 1950s', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 67, no. 2 (January 1997): 225; Thomas Burgess, 'Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 2/3 (2002): 293.
- 158 Decker, 'Reading, Writing, and Respectability', 109.
- 159 www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/735 accessed 16 October 2011; Reinwald, "'Tonight at the Empire?'" , 105.
- 160 ZNA: CA 1/8, Aders to Spurrier, 10 February 1930.
- 161 Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', 106.
- 162 Ibid.
- 163 Ibid.
- 164 ZNA: AB 31/15, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 30 June 1942.
- 165 Another founder member was artist and writer Ladis da Silva. See J. Clement Vaz, *Profiles of Eminent Goans, Past and Present* (New Delhi: Concept, 1997), 265.
- 166 ZNA: AB 31/18, Zanzibar Arts and Crafts Society Catalogue of Exhibits, Fourth

Exhibition, 14–22 February 1948.

167 ZNA: AB 31/15, Chief Secretary to Secretary of Zanzibar Arts and Crafts Society, 20 July 1944.

168 ZNA: AB 41/1, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 16 January 1926.

169 ZNA: AD 5/95, Acting Archivist/Curator to Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare), 21 May 1962.

170 ZNA: DF 9/1, Nicol Smith, Memorandum, 27 July 1942.

171 Nicol Smith, 'The Peace Memorial Museum', 106.

172 ZNA: AB 41/5, Museum Committee Chairman to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1943.

173 *Annual Report of the Zanzibar Museum Report, 1956*, 5.

The Museum and ‘the Unhappy Archives’: Preserving Zanzibar’s Past in the Era of Decolonisation, 1942–1964

Within the dramatic events surrounding the Zanzibar Revolution, a largely unrecognised feature was the delayed opening of the new Archives building. Inauguration was initially scheduled for 1 December 1963, following the declaration of independence, which handed power to the Sultan and the Arab-dominated Zanzibar Nationalist Party. By the time of its official opening in April 1964, the Afro-Shirazi Party had swept aside the Arab minority in the revolution of January 1964 and established a new order. In an intriguing historical coincidence, one of the first national institutions opened in the revolutionary era concerned the preservation of historical documents produced primarily by the Arab and British communities. Naturally, given the violent and transformative events of these months, this event has become a historical footnote. In the context of the Museum and Archive history, this final postponement was only the latest in more than a decade of setbacks in the creation of the new institution. This chapter will examine the protracted debates surrounding the maintenance of the Museum and the establishment of the Archives in the 1950s and early 1960s. This history reveals the fractious process of safeguarding the material vestiges of colonial knowledge.

The collection of documents in the Zanzibar Archives has remained an essential repository for local and international scholars investigating both the colonial and post-colonial eras – they contain information amassed and knowledge produced in earlier eras and continue to be a site for knowledge production in Zanzibar. I use the term ‘collection’ deliberately – many of these documents were originally part of the Museum collection and were retained with a curatorial eye. One of the initial tasks undertaken in 1956 by Cecil Thompson, the only trained archivist in Zanzibar during the colonial period, was to rationalise and select what to preserve. While curators more explicitly tell specific narratives through their displays, the collecting and editing by archivists provides the raw material upon which scholars and historians rely. In the same manner in which

museum collections and exhibitions are forms of historiography, so too are the decisions made by archivists about what material to retain reflective of contemporary concerns. Following the work of Richards, Stoler and others, the Zanzibar Archive collection must be considered as a colonial production with enduring legacy and resonance upon the writing of the history of East Africa and the British Empire. The Colonial Government's acute awareness in the post-war period of the inflammatory nature of its documents, and their attempts to destroy or conceal such material, was revealed in the 2011 landmark trial involving victims of the Mau Mau counter-insurgency.¹ This chapter will demonstrate how in Zanzibar post-war priorities and the uneasy process of decolonisation both affected and infused the creation of the Archives.

Archives represent the past, present and future: judgments, informed by present concerns, are made over which past documents to retain for use by successive generations, whether as policy-makers, historians or others. Sir John Gray drew attention to this in 1960, reporting that the Constitutional Commissioner, Sir Hilary Blood, had demanded to see the results of his research on the history of Zanzibar, 'in order to obtain a historical background to the constitution which he is going to frame'.² Not all civil servants and colonial officers viewed the organisation of their backlog of paperwork in such a way. Evidence in Zanzibar has not yet been discovered about the deliberate destruction of sensitive material, but often these documents themselves are destroyed. In this case, a story emerges of decades of unsystematic and chaotic disposal of documents, inadequate storage in a tropical environment and repeated Government repudiation of responsibility.

The years from 1945 to 1964 in the Museum fall into two phases – separated by the arrival of Thompson, a professional archivist who took on the role of Archivist-Curator, in 1956. The re-configuration of this role reflected the shifting emphasis away from the Museum towards preservation of the documentary material held in the Museum and across government departments. In spite of the turbulence of 1950s and early 1960s, when local community associations defined by their ethnic identity competed for political influence, the Museum appeared unaffected and unchanging – perhaps indicative of its diminishing relevance to the Protectorate Government. A thorough examination of the Museum records demonstrates that politics and representation were issues of concern to the Museum committee, and on occasion anxieties over imminent decolonisation were expressed through the Museum's activities. As we saw in [Chapter 4](#), as tensions between the ZNP and the ASP heightened with the elections looming in 1962, the Curator was asked

to dispose of the slave stocks which lay, unlabelled, outside his office. This minor incident reveals the lackadaisical attitude toward the care for museum objects and their subsequent destruction and a clumsy recognition of the meanings imbued within them.

The history of the Zanzibar Museum after the Second World War was initially typified by frequently changing staff, a curtailment of committee meetings and an absence of professional or experienced input. As Mark Horton writes: 'after 1945, heritage and history slipped firmly down the government agenda'.³ In his history of archaeology in Zanzibar, Horton addresses the efficacy of the sporadic attempts during this post-war period to preserve, excavate and restore local monuments. These activities will therefore not be analysed in detail here although it is important to note that these discussions were ongoing and continued to revive debate over the wide range of skills expected of the Museum staff. Tightened economic times and the absence of dedicated education personnel limited the Museum's involvement in 'colonial development' in spite of its success in this area in the past. Nonetheless the admittedly approximate visitor figures collected from 1945 to 1956 suggest a steady stream of local visitors.⁴

Once again, the Museum was sustained by a few dedicated individuals and by representation at the higher echelons of government – in particular through Sir John Gray, Chief Justice from 1943 to 1952, who championed the archive project. He remained in Zanzibar during his retirement until 1960 and pioneered scholarly research in East Africa, 'setting a new standard' according to Horton.⁵ Gray used a wide range of sources – drawing on local chronicles to supplement the European material. His own attempts to negotiate the disordered archive documents in the Museum and those scattered across government offices doubtless bolstered his determination to create a suitable and organised archive facility.

Thompson, like Gray, his key ally, spent much of his time campaigning for the survival of the Museum and the creation of the Archives. He countered allegations of irrelevance of the institution by describing the Museum as the gift of earlier generations that had been allowed to lapse. It would require consistent financial support from the Government, yet the benefits would be worthwhile: 'Without that co-operation progress will be slow and limited; with it the Museum and Archives, as well as being a visual reminder to all that Zanzibar was well known to the travellers and traders of the civilized world many centuries before the European arrived in Africa to build Nairobi, Salisbury, Johannesburg or Cape Town, can be built up into a worthy centre of culture, instruction and recreation for all to share'.⁶ This lofty and admirable ambition was not realised in his time and he, like

Nicol Smith and Gray, departed frustrated and disappointed. All lamented the lack of recognition of the most basic need of such cultural organisations – well-trained experts. The recurrent salary costs required to subsidise this fundamental necessity remained the stumbling block in negotiations with the late-colonial era Government.

As Richards reminds us, the British Empire was not ‘the longest-lived empire in history, but it was certainly one of the most data-intensive’.⁷ The case of the Zanzibar Archives provides a critical insight into this data management exercise, and the tensions around imperial legacy and the broader development of East African history, hampered by ongoing financial constraints. As elsewhere in the Empire, in Zanzibar the vast ‘task of collecting and classifying knowledge increasingly fell to civil servants operating under state supervision’, a situation with which Thompson and Gray attempted to deal professionally.⁸ It is vital to our readings of the imperial archive to appreciate better the very practical and rudimentary elements of controlling of knowledge – by selection and destruction of records – as the Empire was being dismantled.

This chapter will initially discuss the proposals to extend the Museum after World War Two, a stark contrast with the era after World War One when the Museum was created. It will then sketch out briefly the key political events of the period, and the ways in which inter-community tensions played out in the Museum. The main focus of the chapter will be upon the creation of the Archives, reflecting the shift in interest from material to archival preservation. This protracted project of many years gestation will be examined in detail, in particular the debates over the value of the task and the inadequate funding from Government. The Chief Secretary lamented in 1960 that ‘The unhappy archives have once again got stuck’ – a situation caused by the repeated failure of Government to take responsibility for a task, the legacy of which resonates globally in archives in the post-colonial world.⁹

Memorialisation: Extending the Museum?

The Museum was not a pressing concern for the Government in this period. Only with the pressure to manage and create the Archives did it feature as a serious point of discussion. However, as has been the contention throughout this book, the Museum’s history offers telling insights into wider colonial tensions and preoccupations. One such occasion arose with the need in 1946 to create a memorial to the Second World War. As the existence of the Museum was fundamentally connected with the drive across the Empire to create a

‘fitting memorial’ for the First World War, these debates offer an intriguing comparison through which to view the shifting political and cultural context.

At the end of the Second World War, notices were circulated, as in the late 1910s, giving suggestions of appropriate styles of memorial. Projects with ‘social benefit’ were encouraged if they explicitly stated that they were war memorials, preferably with a Record of Names to distinguish them from other social development works.¹⁰ The Zanzibar Government had chosen this style of memorial after the First World War with the creation of the Museum. Discussions commenced in 1946 about the form of the new memorial. The minimum to which the Government was willing to commit was an additional plaque to accompany that of 1914–1918 by the entrance to the Museum. The Resident indicated in 1946 that pan-imperial pressure was a factor in pursuing a locally funded memorialisation project, in spite of potential local apathy: ‘otherwise we shall be about the only territory which has not done so’.¹¹ A committee was formed with representations from the Arab Association, the Indian Association and two ‘African’ members, the latter notable for their inclusion compared with the absence of representatives from the majority of the population in 1919.

At the first committee meeting, on 20 February 1947, suggestions included a lecture hall as an extension to the Museum Annexe, construction of a clock tower at Mnazi Mmoja with provision of sports facilities for poor children, and creation of children’s playing grounds near Ng’ambo.¹² At the second meeting, in March 1947, the committee agreed that the form of the memorial should be decided before an appeal was launched to ensure its success. Sheikh Mohammed and Ahmed Lakah – the Arab and Indian representatives – were in favour of the lecture hall, arguing that any of the other options would be unlikely to gather support from their respective communities. Mathew Ramadan, speaking for the ‘African’ community, felt it should go towards amenities for the poor. The two British representatives favoured the clock tower and playing grounds.¹³

The lecture hall – discussed for many years as a useful adjunct to the Museum – was deemed appropriate as a war memorial but the presence of the nearby Victoria Hall and the limited space around the Museum precinct made it a challenging project to justify. Dutton, the Chief Secretary, regretted that the existing Museum Annexe design with its skylights prohibited the addition of a second storey, a judgement that indicates his lack of appreciation of the optimum lighting arrangement for a museum. If the lecture hall were approved, Dutton suggested that ‘we should ask Mr Sinclair to design it. It would

be popular and we should get a good hall'.¹⁴ It will be recalled that Sinclair had recently advised on the design for the new airport to ensure the 'traditional' style were maintained. Such a commission would have offered Sinclair a final opportunity to make his distinctive mark on Zanzibar's urban landscape.

In the event, the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the people put an end to these ambitious ideas. Dutton reported that 'It is commonly said that the total number of people killed in action, as apart from deaths generally, was three! I do not know whether this is so, but it is certainly one of the reasons why the appeal has met with so little effect so far'.¹⁵ With the small sum collected – £900 (Sh. 18,000), the Committee decided to put the money towards the construction of five almshouses for the poor. Three additional houses were funded by Tayabali Karimjee Jivanjee, a major local philanthropist from a wealthy merchant family.¹⁶ The buildings were handed over in April 1951 without an official opening at the request of the British Resident.¹⁷ In contrast to the fanfare surrounding the opening of the Peace Memorial Museum, the compromises over this memorial and the lack of local interest testifies to the contrasting social setting of the late 1940s. Local people could not be roused to support an imperial project as they had in the 1920s. The limited funds prevented the construction of a monument, forcing the decision for a cheaper construction that in fact met the welfare and development agenda more closely than did those supported by the elite community representatives. It could also be seen as a victory for Ramadan and the 'African' representatives.

Post-war Development

The Second World War was a surprisingly prosperous time for the islands – the demand for Zanzibar's copra increased after the Japanese seizure of the Dutch East Indies and many previously indebted Arab plantation owners were able to clear themselves of debt.¹⁸ Reflecting on the growing political agitation for representation, the Protectorate Government opened its 1945 report with the following observation:

The people of the Protectorate realise generally that they have much to be thankful for – the cost of living is still high and is likely to remain so for some time to come in keeping with general trend of world events. Impatience with this state of affairs is at times recorded, and there is no doubt that there is generally an awakening of political consciousness – particularly amongst the younger and more educated group of Arabs and the more educated of the Africans.

They are beginning to question the existing state of affairs and to ask the whys and wherefores of economic conditions and to seek for themselves ways of self-expression.

However, the return of prosperity made the Government reluctant to make any radical changes. Additional funds were available for education, medical and social services. In spite of the declarations quoted above and ongoing discussions about how to widen representation in Government, any measures were piecemeal at best, and Arab members continued to exert disproportionate influence. Government policy failed to address the major socio-economic and political imbalances between Zanzibar's communities. For example, 'His Highness's Zanzibar Service' was created in 1947 with the objective to train young Zanzibaris for government posts after tertiary education. The intake was largely dominated by Arabs, with only few Asians and 'Africans' appointed. Former mainlanders were only represented in significant numbers in Government service as policemen.²⁰ As has been mentioned earlier, the population classified as 'African' by the Government was diverse. The failure to recognise the significance of the segment of this population comprising migrants from mainland communities and the semi-settled labourers was a critical oversight by the Government. Simultaneously, during the late 1940s and 1950s, these populations became politicised and motivated to claim their right to participation in Government.

Of the goals espoused by the Government in 1945, grouping together 'Arabs and the more educated Africans', it was recognised that they sought 'ways of self-expression'. The administration at this time agreed to support this 'political inquisitiveness'. As the 1950s wore on, it became clear that independence in some form would be eventually realised. 'Political inquisitiveness' of the immediate post-war period became a more potent force for change during the 1950s, leading to the formation of community associations or the expansion of pre-existing ones. They sought to galvanise particular ethnic groups to claim their right to greater representation in government. Groups from across the diverse 'African' communities particularly demanded wider access to education.

As independence approached, unlike many of the Indian princes in the 1940s and the Buganda on the mainland, Speller notes that 'the Sultan's government was not forced to accept a loss of sovereignty or accession into a larger political unit'.²¹ The constituency alignment of the elections in July 1963 (following the first election in 1961) ensured that the Arab-dominated Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) won by a narrow majority, with the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) polling over 54% of the seats. Following the ceremonies declaring independence in December 1963, the ASP seized power in the

Revolution of 12 January 1964, with thousands of Arabs fleeing.²² In the aftermath of the Revolution, the British did not immediately evacuate their fellow nationals – many held technical positions in the government as it was believed their removal would have risked further destabilising public services.²³

Ethnicity and Representation in the Museum

An important factor in the competing political discourses of the 1950s was the way in which each party imposed its own slant on Zanzibar's history of ethnicity, fusing local and global influences.²⁴ Glassman's pioneering work has complicated our understanding of the deployment of these histories to construct racial and ethnic identities in this period.²⁵ Simultaneously, the British justified their own enduring support of the Sultanate system and the al-Busaidi dynasty using historical models – in particular, by celebrating Seyyid Said, as the 'founder' of modern Zanzibar. As we have seen, the Museum was a central site for representing this narrative, and the related publications embedded it within the school system. As tensions arose and debates about the historic roots of ethnicity intensified, the Museum remained resolutely unchanged in its historical displays. Even once a full-time curator was appointed, Thompson's efforts at revitalising the Museum concentrated on updating the public health and agricultural displays and the nascent archive project, rather than re-examining the relevance and appropriateness of the historical displays. It is likely that any such attempts might have provoked one side or another, at a time when the Government aimed to maintain stability.

One instance worth analysing indicates that the Museum could become intertwined in the complex web of representation and ethnicity. There were no serious consequences, but the opinions voiced and the figures involved reveal much about the Museum within the community in the tense period of the late 1950s. In 1957, Thompson – one year into his tenure as Archivist-Curator – wrote to the Chief Secretary explaining that he wished to bring in 'reliable Arab contacts' to offer advice on 'Arab literary, ethnological and historical material' relating to Zanzibar.²⁶ Thompson hoped to foster 'mutual association' through the participation of one or two Arabs 'preferably of the older generation'. The two names he suggested were Sheikh Abdulla Said al-Kharusi and Sheikh Ali Muhsin al-Barwani. Thompson believed that al-Barwani retained an interest in the Museum having served for a short period on the Committee in 1945–46.²⁷

The two names of al-Kharusi and al-Barwani are notable: from

1958 to 1961, the close connection between these two men and their kinship epitomised the racial and familial ties that dominated Government and nationalist politics in the eyes of the ASP. Al-Kharusi, a rural District Commissioner and landowner, was particularly targeted in *Agozi*, the ASP newspaper, after he not only evicted squatters from his estate but charged and jailed them on seemingly spurious reasons. Later, direct attacks on al-Barwani referred to the acts of ‘your Kharusi cousin’.²⁸ Thompson’s suggestion to bring these particular men onto the Committee predated the period of intense anger directed towards them, but still demonstrates the narrow spectrum of elite communities with whom the British engaged and from whom they sought knowledge about the history of the islands.

It was at this point, after suggesting that these potentially inflammatory figures join the committee, that Thompson made the significant remark, quoted in [Chapter 4](#) about Arab commentators interpreting the Museum’s slave displays as a ‘subtle political weapon’ for creating ethnic divisions.²⁹ Clearly his sources diverted attention away from their own actions in this area. This direct reference to the legacy of slavery is significant as this issue re-emerged as a potent force during some of the worst violence of the Revolution.³⁰ Prior to the 1950s, slavery was rarely mentioned publicly. Occasionally the Arab intelligentsia acknowledged the ‘help’ of slaves in building Zanzibar’s nineteenth-century prosperity in their historical publications, while others expressed a form of ‘apology’, which Glassman notes was typical of pan-Arab discourses at this time surrounding Middle Eastern forms of slavery. More pertinently, a particular source of resentment for the pan-Arabists was the European imperialist narrative, which highlighted the Arab role in the sub-Saharan slave trade.³¹ Writers across the Arab world responded to such accusations by comparing the horrors of the West African slave trade with the apparently more humane character of Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean slavery. Notably, in Zanzibar, the key figure who propagated such a response to European criticism was none other than al-Barwani. Glassman has revealed an important public exchange in *Al-Falaq* between al-Barwani and an anonymous writer, ‘Sceptic’, who accused the former of denying the horrors of Arab slavery. *Al-Falaq* presented the view of Sceptic as, in Glassman’s words, ‘a slanderous attack on the entire Arab world’.³² The Zanzibar Arab intelligentsia drew on various strands of intellectual thought to present slavery on the islands as part of ‘the humane paternalism of Arab civilization’.³³

The offending displays in the Museum might have been those that dated back to the 1920s and 30s, including the slave stocks and the

Explorers display. In keeping with the *School History of Zanzibar*, any allusions to criticism of Arab slavery went hand in hand with celebration of the ‘noble’ liberation of the slaves by the British. As we have seen throughout this book, this conveniently simple message veiled the complexity of the situation in the 1880s and 1890s, when the British were equally culpable of delaying abolition. Pressure from London to abolish slavery swiftly had been resisted by the consuls on the ground in Zanzibar who preferred cautious progress to limit the negative effect upon the economy and landowners. The Museum display overlooked this and focused upon the Sultans who passed the acts abolishing slavery and the slave trade. It even celebrated the life of Tippu Tib – a controversial figure who epitomised the complexity of slavery in East Africa. Of mixed Swahili and Arab origin, he grew to be one of the most famous and richest slave merchants of the region, resident in a palace in Shangani in Stone Town and died a popular member of the Zanzibar elite in 1905.

To be the focus of local politics was ‘the very last thing we want’ and Thompson’s solution was to seek greater representation from different communities upon the Committee – particularly from those who promulgated such critiques. The Museum and its Committee were seen as bodies and physical manifestations that could be changed without major controversy, but could simultaneously appease agitated segments of the community. The Museum could not be immune to commentary arising from what Glassman has described as the ‘multiple intellectual strands’ in a ‘densely woven discourse of difference’.³⁴

Advocates and Experts

Financial constraints and inactivity by Government stifled the Museum and delayed the creation of the Archives, allowing many documents to deteriorate in the tropical environment. Of the expenses associated with the maintenance of a museum and archive, the greatest ongoing cost was staff. Building projects were large one-off investments, and although they required upkeep, especially the Museum, costs of repair to Government buildings were generally absorbed by the Public Works Department. It was people and – in the case of these highly specialised fields – their expertise that represented the greatest recurrent expenditure and also the greatest need. Such individuals could transform the institution and make it relevant and active, as Nicol Smith was able to demonstrate. Some, such as Dutton, acknowledged the specific skills she possessed. However, with the tightened wartime economy, a full-time experienced curator was deemed an expense the Protectorate could do without. From 1942 to

1956, five part-time curators were appointed, of whom J. D. Robertson served the longest – in two separate terms. Robertson was a medical doctor who had been on the Museum committee since 1939 and formerly worked in the pathology laboratory. His great passion was for conchology and helminthology (study of worms) – about which he published in 1952 shortly before his departure from Zanzibar.³⁵

The Museum Committee failed in its mission to persuade the Government that the Museum could play an active role in the post-war development programme. Robertson chaired the Museum Committee when it was decided that if the Education Department took over the Museum's educational activities, 'the volume of work in the Museum ... is insufficient to justify the appointment of a full time Curator'.³⁶ At this time, the Committee believed the Museum's activities could best be continued by aligning it with the activities of the social services through the Agricultural, Medical and Educational departments. In view of the necessary skills especially with regard to tropical disease, 'the type of man whom the Committee have in view in making this recommendation, who would be competent to deal with such matters, is a fully trained Economic Biologist'. They would prefer 'a young man (in the late twenties or early thirties)' and 'specifically recommended that the post should not be offered to a retired official on pension at a small salary'.³⁷ In spite of this expressed preference for a qualified candidate, in the event, the role continued to be taken on by officers alongside their duties, appointed for their interest and dedication rather than any museum expertise. Some, such as G. A. Porteous and Edna Oxtoby, were more active than others. The former made active changes to displays, such as refurbishing a set of *viti vya enzi* (Swahili chairs of power) found in the stores and redisplaying them while the latter particularly attended to the Library and manuscripts. In general, the Museum survived on a 'care and maintenance basis' during these years, mainly thanks to the continued service of the local staff.

The failure to secure support for the Museum as a resource for supporting the welfare agenda coincided with renewed interest in its historical collections, in particular the archival material, critically invigorated by the intervention of Sir John Gray, long-term Chief Justice and historian. The success of cultural projects, as we have repeatedly seen, was dependent upon vocal and consistent support from individuals at the top of the Government hierarchy. Such figures could appeal directly to the British Resident when the institution's value was questioned by sceptics. In Sir John Gray, the Museum was fortunate in having an advocate who could exert influence locally in the political sphere, was a widely respected historian and was acutely

aware of the need for professional curators and archivists. He was Chairman of the Museum Committee from 1947 until a few days before his departure in 1960.³⁸ The activities of the Committee appear dependent upon the time he could devote to it. From 1952 to 1956, while his attentions focused upon on the nascent archive project, the Museum Committee flagged – one member complained in 1955 that it had not met for over a year and that ‘The whole show is in the doldrums’.³⁹ Such was the danger of reliance upon an individual to drive an institution.

Gray planned from the mid 1940s to write a *History of Zanzibar*, a project that would not be published until 1962, but the process revealed to him the scope and state of the records in Zanzibar. Gray became a regular contributor to *Tanganyika Notes and Records* following his first article in 1944 on ‘Stanley vs. Tibboo Tip’, and continued to publish after his return to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Scanning the titles of these articles it is possible to see the wealth and range of material he uncovered in Zanzibar. He was therefore able to bring personal experience to bear, as well as making a strong case for their relevance to the history of the entire region: ‘As I have said more than once before, our archives are older and more valuable than any other East African archives and throw important light on matters affecting the main continent as well as the Protectorate’.⁴⁰ This line of argument gave the opportunity for the Protectorate to highlight its historic importance in the wider context, but such thoughts were less of a priority than they had been in the 1920s.

On his departure in early 1960, his successor as Committee chairman, A. C. Ledger, thanked him noting that the Committee acknowledged ‘the privilege of having as Chairman the greatest authority on the history of East Africa’.⁴¹ Thompson keenly felt the impact of his departure – the Archives Department lost:

... its staunchest supporter and greatest friend. His erudition and his encyclopaedic knowledge of Zanzibar affairs are greatly missed. He was the authority to whom everyone turned on all matters of Zanzibar history. From his first arrival in Zanzibar he had campaigned above all to secure recognition of the unique value of the Zanzibar archives for the future of East Africa’.⁴²

Even Gray, however, was not able to see the project through to fruition, despite decades of campaigning and a donation from his own purse. His scholarly publications are still well-regarded texts charting political activities of the Sultan’s government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, his works stand up alongside those of Coupland – who we saw earlier was regarded as the first ‘professional’ historian of East Africa, and Gray’s publications certainly testify to a greater depth of primary research.

Forcing Government to recognise the skills of the professionals was a key part of Gray's mission. He seized upon the moment in 1952, when the British Resident expressed an interest in appointing a full-time curator and included in the request to the Secretary of State that care of archives was part of the role as 'knowledge of that art is necessary'.⁴³ The Finance Secretary was not prepared to include the cost of this role in the estimates for 1952 or 1953. In the intervening years, an Archives Committee was set up with Gray as the Chair, discussed in more detail below; this body recommended in 1954 that a fully qualified and trained archivist should be included in the estimates for 1955.⁴⁴ The vacancy for an Archivist-Curator was advertised in June, but there were no applicants until Thompson applied in October. His qualifications as archivist in Nyasaland, part of the Central African Archives, put him in an ideal position and his appointment was confirmed in October.

The hybrid post was a convenient compromise for the Government – responding to the ongoing queries about the future of the Museum, Gray's continued pressure, the 1949 Colonial Office circular on archives (see below) and members of the academic community to take proper responsibility for the archives. However, as Thompson made clear throughout his tenure of the post, the needs of the two institutions were incompatible – the daily public-facing demands of the Museum compared with the closed-door preservation, editing and filing of archival material. Thompson committed as much time as he was able to the Museum, although the Archives were his main focus. Of the major changes he undertook in the Museum, a thorough renovation of the educational exhibits, removing out-of-date advice, was the most significant. He acknowledged his limited museum expertise and relied upon the local staff to continue the technical tasks. To the untrained eye, there appeared to be commonalities in the two fields. There was a shared ideological mission in the preservation of historic material, but the skills, training and techniques were entirely different.

Once Thompson was in post, Gray continued to act as a government intermediary – transmitting the meaning of the archives beyond Zanzibar to unwilling bureaucrats and highlighting the expertise of Thompson. A message to the Chief Secretary in January 1959 was typical. Gray enclosed a cutting from a review in the *American Archivist* of a book that made reference to Thompson's 1956 report on the Zanzibar Archives:

Moreover, even in this small African territory, the management of an ever-increasing volume of government records is a problem. It evokes from the Zanzibar Archivist this familiar, plaintive observation: 'Something must be done to control the flood of paper and rescue the future research worker, whether historian,

The reviewer went on to praise the way in which Thompson was dealing with these issues, with approved archival principles: 'Archivists and curators everywhere can read the report with profit'.⁴⁶ The extract itself highlights international approval of Thompson's aims for preservation and the usefulness to archivists worldwide of studying his attempts to overcome these challenges. The Zanzibar Government was guilty of undervaluing Thompson's professional advice and underfunding the project, although clearly archivists across the globe shared this lack of recognition or support for their endeavours.

In spite of Gray's advocacy, and in a manner reminiscent of the pre-war experience of Nicol Smith, Thompson found the Government unsympathetic to many of his requests, which were based on solid professional principles. As we shall see, his insistence that recurrent funding was integral to any sensible archives policy was repeatedly ignored, creating an ongoing stalemate throughout the late 1950s.

Separating 'the Sheep from the Goats': Creating and Editing a Colonial Archive

Historical manuscripts from the nineteenth century had been regarded, since the time of Spurrier, as the most significant items in the Zanzibar Museum's collection. The imperative to preserve these fragile connections to the heyday of empire, when Zanzibar was a global force, was a compelling defence of the Museum and its collections. As we have seen, colonial officers with an interest in history from the early days of the Protectorate, including Lyne, Pearce and Crofton, had consulted such documents. Coupland was the first university-based scholar to travel to Zanzibar and examine these historic papers in 1928. While staying at the Residency for nine days, Coupland made 'a full examination of the local archives preserved at the Bet-el-Ajaib, the Residency and the Museum'.⁴⁷ The Beit al-Ajaib held administrative papers of the Secretariat and other government departments, while manuscripts and historic papers were stored in the Museum and Residency.

Richards has argued that this abundance of paperwork was central to the existence of the Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He carefully distinguishes between knowledge and information – in many cases, the mass of information collected did not lead to any particular exacting of control, but the very act of its collection, documentation and distribution across the globe gave an effective impression of bureaucratic order. As Richards notes: 'This paper shuffling, however, proved to have great influence. It required

keeping track, and keeping track of keeping track'.⁴⁸ While Richards explores how the imperial archive 'as a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire' was imagined through literary texts, it is vital that we understand more about the reality of dealing with the mass of paper collected during more than a century of paper shuffling in Zanzibar.⁴⁹

The preservation of documents had a chequered history in Zanzibar. The challenge in recovering the story of record preservation is, of course, that rarely do we know what we no longer have. Only occasionally, the loss of documents or their destruction is recorded. A picturesque scene was retold by Thompson who described Sir John Kirk chasing historic papers down the street during the hurricane of 1872. The teak chest 'in which many valuable documents were preserved' and many pigeon-hole notes of current business were 'gutted of their contents'. Next morning Kirk recovered many in the street but 'other documents of importance are utterly lost and cannot be replaced'.⁵⁰

Helen Haylett, née Wilson, the contemporary of Nicol Smith first introduced in [Chapter 3](#), indicated concern over the unsystematic culling of old records after her arrival at the Secretariat in 1935. On being asked to organise the files, she discovered that they had not been reviewed since the transfer of administration to the Colonial Office in 1913. She found a vast quantity of material, with new files opened and old ones remaining. She embarked on 'drastic pruning ... sometimes too drastic I fear, but the new system counterparting the C.O. one was introduced, not with much approbation from the clerical staff'.⁵¹ The overwhelming quantity of disorganised files required her to take rapid action. As indicated by the delegation of this task to a newcomer in Zanzibar, the Government filing system and the selection of what to retain was not a serious consideration.

Such an approach to record management was the subject of criticism from Sir Guy Pilling, British Resident in 1945. In a note to the Chief Secretary on 4 September 1945 he recorded his surprise at the lack of an archives service. Pilling observed that:

... the practice followed here is, whenever the available filing space is congested, to burn those files which are considered to be unimportant. That is in my opinion a dangerous system, since there have been 3 or 4 occasions when desired information was not available owing to the destruction of the documents. Also it is difficult to forecast what correspondence may or may not have importance or historical value in the future.⁵²

Pilling recommended that once the current building programme had been completed, consideration should be given to an archive to hold 50 years worth of files and other documents: 'At the end of that period the "sheep" could easily be separated from the "goats"'.⁵³ His belief

was that 50 years followed by selection by a professional archivist would be an effective system and responsible course of action. He also recommended their removal from the Beit al-Ajaib, which, as an entirely wooden structure, was deemed a fire hazard. Repeated notes in the files draw attention to environmental damage, including insect attacks by white ants, termites and cockroaches, as well as leakages in the Secretariat and the ongoing issue of the preservation of paper in intense humidity.

On 11 March 1948, the Colonial Office circulated a memorandum on the preservation of official records in Colonial territories, by Secretary of State, Arthur Creech Jones. The London office feared that, in spite of developments such as the creation of the Central African Archives, elsewhere arrangements for sorting, storing and preserving material had ‘not kept pace with the accumulation’, with the risk that documents and records ‘of permanent historical value may be seriously damaged or even destroyed or lost’.⁵⁴ The memorandum enclosed with the circular explained how there had been in Europe and the Americas ‘an immense increase in *Public Appreciation of the Importance of Archives*’. However, there was a ‘*regrettable lack of information in this Country in regard to Colonial Archives*’.⁵⁵ To this end, the Colonial Office wanted to survey the current situation across the Empire. Zanzibar’s case epitomised these fears.

A. S. Cumming Bruce, an Assistant Secretary in the mid 1940s and later Housing Officer, on his own initiative began to salvage significant documents from the Government files in 1948 and was given responsibility for drafting a response to the survey. He recommended inviting Gray to advise on their preservation and rehabilitation, although this matter was not taken up at the time. The British Resident explained to the Secretary of State in response to the survey that there were no trained archivists or any officials with responsibility for preservation of archives.⁵⁶ Insufficient funds were available for a curator who might normally supervise Government records; he therefore asked for advice on safeguarding archives from insect damage and the ideal climatic conditions if a special archive room were to be built. A visit from V. W. Hiller of the Central African Archives prompted Gray to write to Dutton, the Chief Secretary, trying to emphasise the urgency of the matter: ‘I can confidently say that we in Zanzibar have the most valuable archives of the whole lot, dating back as they do to 1840, and containing as they do information relating to the early history not only of Zanzibar, but also of the three mainland territories’.⁵⁷ He observed significant deterioration since his last examination five years before and tried to explain that ‘each year of delay increases both the risk of further deterioration and also the

cost of restoration and preservation. It is very much a case of “sudden death” amongst archives, but in this case we do know the remedy and the sooner we adopt it the better’.⁵⁸ A token figure was included in the 1952 estimates for some preliminary work.

Several discussions at this time circulated around creating a joint East African archive service, on the model of the Central African Archives. Naturally, all territories were similarly struggling to retain and preserve this material and all lacked experts to look after them. Gray felt it could be worthwhile that Zanzibar subscribe to a Joint Archival Service for £1500 per year. As so often happened, such collaborative efforts were resisted by the Protectorate Government – in part due to the financial commitment but also the fear of becoming subsumed and neglected within a larger project: ‘It rather appears to me that in a joint service Zanzibar is generally regarded as the Cinderella of East Africa and insufficient attention paid to our requirements’.⁵⁹ Such resistance, however, put pressure back on the Zanzibar Government to take responsibility for her ‘own very precious archives’.⁶⁰ Another 14 years elapsed before the building was erected. Amongst other issues, there was a conflict within the Government about the ultimate purpose of the archives. The Financial Secretary worried that some in Government championed the archives to give employment to professional archivists or provide ‘ready-made’ resources to historians of East Africa: ‘We are doing neither, but only seeking to preserve our valuable documents from destruction and to carry out such elimination of worthless ones’.⁶¹

The small sum committed to the Archives in the 1952 estimates paid for Mr Craigie, taken on in January 1952, to repair and bind documents. He too was overwhelmed by the quantity of work and continually pleaded for assistance as well as an increase in his token salary of £10 per month. Dutton regretted that no more could be committed: ‘The work is obviously worth much more and if Mr Craigie decides to throw it up the Protectorate will be the loser’.⁶² Craigie resigned in May and left Zanzibar in June 1952.

Yet another intervention was attempted by Anthony Low, then Assistant Lecturer in History at Makerere, who went on to become one of the major imperial historians of the twentieth century. He spent nearly two months studying the material in the first half of 1952. As well as underlining the importance of the material, he proposed a scheme for organisation and suggested funding possibilities, including the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations.⁶³ His note was well received by members of the Secretariat and encouraged by the suggestion to contact charitable trusts. Blame for inactivity and reluctance to commit funds from Government was apportioned upon the ‘Unofficial Members of the S.F.C. [Standing Finance Committee]’

who were apparently not interested in the preservation of historic documents.⁶⁴ This reference directs responsibility to the local – Arab, Indian and African – members. It was at this point that the idea of a joint Archivist and Curator began to gain currency – the appointment for the curatorship was to be postponed again for financial reasons, but the ‘urgency and importance of our priceless archives’ made a ‘Curator-cum-Archivist’ a more realistic proposition.⁶⁵

Advice was sought from the Secretary of the British Museum about how to set up an archive, and some progress was apparent when a consultant for the Ford Foundation, William O. Brown, expressed some interest. The Resident decided that a small committee might undertake a survey to work out what a foundation might request. In July 1953 Gray was invited to chair the Archives Committee. They were to make inventories of the Government papers, assess storage conditions and make recommendations as to their future use. The Committee reported back in April 1954. They urgently recommended the transferral to temporary accommodation for all pre-1915 material to protect it from insect attacks, the appointment of a Chief Archivist, creation of a card catalogue and serious consideration of establishing a Zanzibar Archives supported by the appropriate legal and administrative machinery.⁶⁶ The Committee estimated that the total foot-run of the current archives was 745 feet, which they considered the absolute minimum requirement for a new building.

The appointment of the Archivist-Curator role was held up until this Committee reported. In the meantime the Acting Administrative Secretary suggested relocating the Museum to the old Fort, and making the current Museum building into a library with the Annexe as a store for archives. As had been observed since its creation, he noted that ‘the Peace Memorial building is not really suitable as a Museum’. But he believed it could be an ideal space for a library – with niches for books and a central reading area.⁶⁷ The Chief Secretary rejected this proposal on several grounds, mainly as an excessively ambitious and costly idea, but two points – firstly that the Museum was too far from the centre of town to be a public library and secondly that the Annexe was larger than the archives needed to be – are illuminating given the final outcome.

The Secretary of State in 21 July 1954 made clear that external funding would be unforthcoming as they rarely funded posts or capital expenditure: ‘This means therefore that the preservation and housing of the Zanzibar Archives must (I think rightly) remain the responsibility of Government, and the necessary finance found from local resources’.⁶⁸ The priority, he believed, was the appointment of a qualified archivist for which the Colonial Office would offer full support in finding an appropriate candidate. Thompson finally

commenced work on 2 June 1956. His 1957 report highlight the key issues reiterated over decades. In 1958, he presented initial results from a survey of the records to be retained and expressed concern that ‘some documents from interwar period may have been deliberately destroyed (as pre-1914 they are virtually complete)’.⁶⁹ Of the 7,000 files examined, 2,616 he considered important to keep. But this was only a preliminary survey.

Not only did Thompson want to assemble the archives from the various departments in a single building for their protection and preservation, he also wanted to allow for their availability for public consultation.⁷⁰ The Secretariat and the Residency were clearly inappropriate for public visitation and research. Such an aim demonstrated his awareness of the wider relevance for archives and their meaning, although it ran counter to the views of many in Government who saw it only as a storehouse. As will be seen, it also made the location of the institution a bone of contention.

Designing and Locating a Suitable Building

On Thompson’s arrival, he was under the impression that the Government had already committed itself to funding a building. The Museum was woefully inadequate for the needs of Government archives, never having been conceived by its architects for this purpose. A close examination of the Government correspondence makes clear that a major stumbling block was estimating the necessary size. Material was located in a vast array of buildings from former palaces to office blocks, with cupboards and rooms of various sizes occupying hundreds of metres of shelf-space. Thompson insisted that for an accurate proposal to be made, he required suitable temporary accommodation and staff in order to do a preliminary sift of departmental records. In 1958, when funds for staff were eliminated from his estimates, yet the building was included, he stated that there was no point in continuing.⁷¹ Thompson found himself in a vicious circle: he could not present a realistic plan without a survey, which required staff and a suitable alternative space in which to amass and assess the material. When space was allocated to him, but funds for staff were cut, he tried to explain the futility in pursuing the project. Frustration on this count boiled over and, like Nicol Smith before him, his resistance was perceived as petulance, which did not strengthen his case. Repeatedly the Government refused to commit to the ‘recurrent expenditure’ of salaries to staff the new institution. Thompson referred them to the example of the Mauritius Archives, which with ‘responsibilities very comparable to those of Zanzibar, has a staff of fifteen, exclusively engaged on archives work. Yet the

Archivist there is in despair at his inability to keep pace with the flow of records'.⁷² The Zanzibar Government was unmoved by the attempt to compare them unfavourably with one of their Indian Ocean island neighbours. Circumstances could not be more different from the early 1920s, when Sinclair's designs for the memorial and museum had been governed by his own architectural vision rather than any particular spatial or curatorial concerns.

After years of campaigning and delays, Gray resorted to putting up these funds himself. In 1959, he offered a donation of £200–£250, which he hoped would propel the process. He made arrangements for the sum to remain in a local bank account to be drawn on at an appropriate time. He donated not only to the building project but also to the Museum and Library in May 1960. Tellingly, he sent his donation directly to Thompson personally 'so that HM Govt cannot lay hands on it and that the Auditor will be unable to criticise the expenditure'.⁷³ In 1961 he wrote to ask of progress and also to remind the Chief Secretary that it could be put towards no other purpose. In the event, it was returned to him as he saw little action and would 'be glad to have the money' for his own purposes in England.⁷⁴

Requests were made in 1960 again for funds from international charitable organisations. Although unsuccessful the responses are revealing. The Carnegie Corporation, which had supported the Museum in the 1930s, explained that they were focusing upon formal education, including teacher training, and were committed several projects in Nigeria at the time.⁷⁵ The Rockefeller Foundation responded that:

While this Foundation is interested in the encouragement of some aspects of research in African history, I do not believe we have any clear view at this moment as to what role the archives in East Africa should play in this respect or what historians or others feel are research priorities which might be served through archival collections.⁷⁶

The Chief Secretary responded by writing to the lecturer in African history at School of Oriental and African Studies asking for reassurance of the value of the archival projects. At this moment, with the future of an independent Africa on the cusp, few were ready to commit to preserving the various territories' pasts.

By June 1960, a preliminary architect's plan had been drawn up by Ajit Singh for a building costing £16,000. Thompson noted in a letter to Gray that this offered a larger building for £4,000 less than an earlier design, although Thompson had heard from a 'private word from Singh' that this earlier estimate had been unreasonably inflated.⁷⁷ In 1961, they hoped to be successful in receiving funds from the Legislative Council to commence the building in July of that

year.⁷⁸ Thompson left in 1962, after five years of wrangling, particularly over the issue of the recurrent costs – he continually emphasised that there were no point in creating a building without a staff to take care of it. The site was not confirmed on Thompson's departure but increasingly out-of-town sites were preferred. £18,000 was voted in during 1962 and planning permission was being sought for a site near the new Police Headquarters at Ziwani. The use by the public was entirely disregarded in the choice of this site nearly two miles from Stone Town (See [Figure 1.5](#)).

By April 1963 the first floor was already standing and nearing completion in July 1963. After various discussions it was suggested to open the Archives during Independence week in December. Invitations were printed for an event on Friday 20 December 1963 at 5 pm with a ceremony led by the Sultan. Once again, with the competing demands of staffing and construction, it was proposed to delay the opening until an Archivist-Curator was appointed: 'The ceremony otherwise would be an "empty" one'.⁷⁹ The new incumbent was due to arrive on 12 January, so it was proposed to delay the opening until 17 January. Although the Revolution itself of 10 January is not mentioned specifically in this correspondence, one immediate intervention was reported. Mr Cook, the newly arrived Archivist-Curator, phoned a member of the Secretariat to inform him that:

a group of men from the Revolutionary Forces had visited the new building, and had spoken of the possibility of the Field Marshal's requiring the Library as an office. No reference by the Rev.y Forces had been made to this Ministry.⁸⁰

A month later this was regarded as 'rather past history now'.⁸¹ Yet it offers a sideways view into the upheaval following independence and revolution. With the protracted and painful construction process, it would have been a bitter irony had the Archive building become a government office before it had even been officially opened.

The Museum and Archives in Post-Revolutionary Zanzibar: Transforming Spaces and Displays

Museums and archives are constantly evolving bodies, shaped by their employees, responsible politicians and outsiders. The focus of this book, as has been stated from the outset, has been upon the colonial-era museum. A close investigation into the post-colonial period is beyond its scope. However, it is useful to consider the more recent history of these objects and their settings. The survival of the archives, the objects and remnants of earlier exhibits has enabled much of the research for this project, while the changing display spaces indicate

the ways in which the museum model is being reconfigured for present needs and concerns.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Zanzibar Museum displays remained unchanged and were subject to pillage and looting of any object containing silver and gold. Sheriff, Voogt and Luhila chide the Revolutionary Government for failing to seize the opportunity to maintain and adapt the Museum: 'The revolution failed not only to revolutionise the concept of the museum in Zanzibar, which should have been at its forefront, but it even failed to preserve what had been in inherited as part of the national heritage, which was its duty'.⁸²

A short book published by the ASP in 1974 on Zanzibar's history extolled the virtues of Zanzibar's citizens in their interest in the subject.⁸³ It is worth reminding ourselves that one of President Karume's first actions on gaining power was to ban the teaching of history in schools.⁸⁴ This book proclaimed that the number of museum visitors had more than doubled from the colonial period to reach a peak of 394,410 in 1970. The author judged that this rise was 'due to the fact that the people's craving for knowledge is greater now than ever before'.⁸⁵ There was a commitment to preserve the Archives 'for present and future use by the Government, researchers, historians and the people at large' and to make 'every effort ... to treasure the documents despite the destruction and theft of them by some people'. The book does not apportion blame to colonial or post-colonial figures with this statement. Certainly the colonial Government was guilty of negligence in this area and other documents may have disappeared subsequently.

The original Museum building remained open until the late 1990s, when government and international interest coincided to revive the museum system in Zanzibar and relocate the collections in a new display in the Beit al-Ajaib. Since that time the former Museum has remained formally closed, occasionally opening for single-day exhibitions. Funds were secured from the World Bank in the 2000s for its renovation but this project has yet to commence. The steel frame supporting the dome is likely to be unstable after 90 years in the tropical climate. For many years, the building lay dormant, surrounded by an overgrown garden, absent of life, while the Mnazi Mmoja hospital opposite teemed with people. At the time of writing, it has been re-opened with a temporary panel display while the Beit al-Ajaib is renovated (see Conclusion). A large tree has grown on the site of the Lloyd Mathews obelisk memorial, evidently removed at some time since 1964. Visitors to Zanzibar Town rarely find their way as far as the former Museum on foot but speed past in cars to and from the airport.

The selection of the Beit al-Ajaib to house the new museum

represented the latest in a series of reconfigurations of this centrepiece of Zanzibar's cityscape. Its metaphorical and symbolic power is palpable. Garth Myers has used the three storeys of this building as an analytical frame through which to interrogate the politics of urban planning and power relationships in colonial Africa.⁸⁶ Sultan Barghash constructed the ceremonial palace in the 1880s. Since that time it has dominated the town's sea front: its distinctive form with three-storied verandas towers over adjacent plain-fronted palaces. The clock tower was incorporated into the building after the bombardment of 1896 destroyed the freestanding lighthouse in front. Like Sinclair's Zanzibar Museum it was formed out of a spirit of eclecticism. The standard plan of an Arab palace formed the basis of the design with a large atrium spanning the entire height of the building and rooms lining each of the three floors.⁸⁷ The verandas on three sides were a novel addition, inspired by buildings Barghash had seen in India, and were supported by tall thin iron columns cast in Britain. The building also contained artistic and technological wonders, including its massive carved doors, the Sultan's collection of ceramics and marble flooring. The first electric generator in Sub-Saharan Africa powered its magnificent chandeliers and symbolised Barghash's keen embrace of modern technology and industry.

Unlike the Zanzibar Museum, this was not designed as a public building. It was a regulated space, access to which was carefully controlled. The Sultan's collection of modern wonders and artefacts was not on view to the majority of Zanzibar's population. Stage-managed events, preceded by processions through the town, emphasised the exclusive nature of the ceremonies and receptions inside. Not only did the magisterial building proclaim the power of Barghash's Sultanate, but social and racial hierarchies were asserted through these elaborate performances. In 1913, on the accession of Sultan Khalifa and the reorganisation of the Government, it became the offices of the Secretariat, where Helen Haylett would later work, and the venue for Executive and Legislative Council meetings.

While the colonial-era museum display remained unchanged in the decades following the Revolution, the Beit al-Ajaib was the site of the only explicit museum project by the Revolutionary Government. In the years after the Revolution, installed within it was the ASP's 'Ideological College and Party Museum', designed by a group from North Korea in their 'Great Leader' model.⁸⁸ Unfortunately this display was largely destroyed by the time the Government took repossession of the building in 1992, with little remaining evidence of its contents and reportedly had little local impact.⁸⁹ While its new leaders were celebrated, the exodus of the Arab community and the

cessation of teaching of history pulled a veil over this period that was not lifted until the mid 1990s, with the commencement of the new national museum programme. Ironically, the first new display to be opened on the celebration of the Revolution in 1994 was the Sultan's Palace Museum, which charted the history of the Sultanate.⁹⁰ This display remains not dissimilar in tone to those in the colonial-era Zanzibar Museum.

A more sensitive interpretation, presenting a longer-view of Zanzibar's Indian Ocean history and the social life of the Swahili, was created by the project that Sheriff, Voogt and Luhila led and recorded between 2000 and 2005. Local curators were supported by international partnership projects to construct the current exhibits, many of which displayed material from the original Zanzibar Museum. The former offices on each floor of the Beit al-Ajaib now contain exhibition galleries designed carefully to reflect the contemporary interpretation of Zanzibar's history and contemporary culture. Included in these are displays which re-create Swahili and Arab homes – reminiscent of Ingrams's 1927 temporary display, but markedly absent of the paternalistic mission of personal improvement of the earlier example.

The Zanzibar Archives lie nearly two miles from the bustling hub of Zanzibar's Stone Town. As Gray and Thompson repeated claimed, they contain incomparable sources for the history of East Africa, and the documents continue to be well-used by scholars. The creation of the Archives in the late-colonial era, in spite of the problems and likely loss of material in the process, ensured the survival of the mass of documentation that underpinned colonial governance. Successive archivists and historians will continue to excavate these sites of knowledge to seek meaning in the remaining assemblage of material and the implications of the lacunae.

The Beit al-Ajaib remains the centrepiece of Zanzibar town's cityscape. Tourists climb the monumental stairwell to absorb the spectacular view from the verandas. In the interior, visitors gape in awe at the great atrium rising over all three floors, currently housing a large dhow in a display celebrating the millennia-old Indian Ocean trade. The visitors largely consist of overseas tourists, while school groups attend for special sessions. Outside, crowds congregate nightly at the newly landscaped Forodhani gardens, with the Beit al-Ajaib providing a spectacular backdrop to the lively evening food-market, frequented by locals and tourists alike. Sited adjacent to the seashore

in the hub of the tourist area, this is a natural location for a museum.

The bowl, drums and horns of the Mwinyi Mkuu have been reunited and displayed alongside a mannequin of the leader and an artist's impression of Dunga Palace in the nineteenth century. The story of the pre-colonial communities commands equal status with Zanzibar's other rulers. The enduring significance of objects and their meaning is made clear by a photograph on the label of the former regalia – showing how, after Revolution in 1964, the drums of the Mwinyi Mkuu were removed from the Zanzibar Museum and played in the streets. In spite of their multiple relocations they had retained their meaning, and once more rallied a call to arms.

1 See David M. Anderson, 'Mau Mau in the High Court and the "Lost" British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 699–716; Mandy Banton, 'Destroy? "Migrate"? Conceal? British Strategies for the Disposal of Sensitive Records of Colonial Administrations at Independence', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (2012): 321–35; Edward Hampshire, '"Apply the Flame More Searingly": The Destruction and Migration of the Archives of British Colonial Administration: A Southeast Asia Case Study', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 334–52.

2 ZNA: DF 9/6, Gray to Thompson, 11 May 1960.

3 Mark Horton, *History of Archaeology in Zanzibar* (forthcoming).

4 Data drawn from the infrequent reports of the Museum between 1945–1956 in ZNA: AB 41/5.

5 Horton, *History of Archaeology*.

6 ZNA: AB 41/5, Government Archives and Museum Report, 1956, 38.

7 Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, 4.

8 *Ibid.*, 11.

9 ZNA: AB 41/27, Assistant Chief Secretary (V) to Chief Secretary, 12 December 1960.

10 ZNA: AB 27/25, War Memorial Advisory Committee meeting minutes, November 1944.

11 ZNA: AB 27/25, British Resident to Chief Secretary, 3 December 1946.

12 ZNA: AB 27/25, War Memorial Committee meeting minutes, 20 February 1947.

13 ZNA: AB 27/25, War Memorial Committee meeting minutes, 6 March 1947.

14 ZNA: AB 27/25, Dutton, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 5 June 1947.

15 ZNA: AB 27/25, Dutton, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 31 December 1947.

16 Gijsbert Oonk, *The Karimjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa 1800–2000* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

17 ZNA: AB 27/25, Dutton, Chief Secretary to Comptroller of Customs, 19 April 1951; Press Communiqué, 30 June 1951.

18 Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*, 21.

19 ZNA: BA 18/24, Annual Report of Provincial Administration for 1945, 1.

20 Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*, 22.

21 Ian Speller, 'An African Cuba? Britain and the Zanzibar Revolution, 1964', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, no. 2 (2007): 285.

22 For further analysis of the Revolution, see Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*; Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*; John Lonsdale, 'East Africa', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brown and Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 530–45.

23 Speller, 'An African Cuba?', 287.

24 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 17–18.

25 *Ibid.*, 8–10.

26 ZNA: DF 9/5, Thompson to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1957.

27 ZNA: AB 41/2, al-Barwani to Robertson, Curator, 1 January 1946.

28 Quoted in Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 211.

29 ZNA: DF 9/5, Thompson to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1957.

30 Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 92.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*, 94.

34 *Ibid.*, 93.

35 A. C. Stephen and J. D. Robertson, 'A Preliminary Report on the Echiuridae and Sipunculidae of Zanzibar', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Section B: Biology* 64, no. 4 (1952): 426–44.

36 ZNA: AB 41/2, Museum Committee Minutes, 19 August 1942.

37 *Ibid.*

38 ZNA: AD 5/90, Annual Report of the Museum and Archives 1960 (typed manuscript not printed report), 10.

39 ZNA: AB 41/3, Committee member (s.n.) to member of Secretariat, 10 June 1955.

- 40 ZNA: AD 5/90, Gray to Chief Secretary, 15 January 1959.
- 41 ZNA: AD 5/101, Minutes of Museum Committee Meeting, 28 January 1960, 11.
- 42 ZNA: AD 5/90, Annual Report of the Museum and Archives 1960, 10.
- 43 ZNA: AB 41/3, Administrative Secretary to Finance Secretary, 21 June 1952.
- 44 ZNA: AB 41/3, Archives Committee Report, 20 April 1954.
- 45 ZNA: AD 5/90, Extract from *American Archivist*: Review of Books, p 435–6 (s.d.) review by Harold T Pinkett.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXVI No 1905, 21 July 1928, 193. This research was published in his various works including *Kirk on the Zambesi* (1928), *East Africa and its Invaders* (1938) and *The Exploitation of East Africa* (1939).
- 48 Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, 4.
- 49 Ibid., 6.
- 50 ZNA: AB 41/5, Government Archives and Museum Report of 1956, 9.
- 51 RHL: Haylett papers MSS.Afr.s.1946/1: 'An Account of my Two Tours as Office Assistant in the Secretariat, Zanzibar, 1935–1942', 4.
- 52 ZNA: AB 41/24, British Resident to Acting Chief Secretary, 4 September 1945.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 ZNA: AB 41/24: Colonial Office Circular Despatch, 11 March 1948.
- 55 ZNA: AB 41/24: Memorandum on Colonial Archives, 11 March 1948.
- 56 ZNA: AB 41/24: British Resident to Secretary of State, 21 May 1948.
- 57 ZNA: AB 41/24: Gray to Dutton, Chief Secretary, 20 July 1951.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 ZNA: AB 41/24, Acting Administrative Secretary to British Resident [s.d., c. August/September 1951].
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 ZNA: AB 41/24, Financial Secretary to Dutton, Chief Secretary, 18 September 1951.
- 62 ZNA: AB 41/24, Dutton, Chief Secretary to Finance Secretary, 28 April 1952.
- 63 ZNA: AB 41/24, D. A. Low to Assistant Secretary, Secretariat, 9 June 1952. Another scholar questioning the state of the archives and urging their preservation on microfilm was E. Haddon who had met Zanzibari students at East Africa House in London who were unaware of the presence of old Swahili manuscripts: ZNA: AB 41/24, Haddon to British Resident, 10 November 1952.
- 64 ZNA: AB 41/24, Acting Administrative Secretary to Chief Secretary, 20 June 1952.
- 65 ZNA: AB 41/24, Acting Administrative Secretary to Chief Secretary, 23 September 1952.
- 66 ZNA: AB 41/3, Archives Committee Report, 20 April 1954.
- 67 ZNA: AB 41/24, Acting Administrative Secretary to Chief Secretary, 13 February 1954.
- 68 ZNA: AB 41/24, Secretary of State to British Resident, 21 July 1954.
- 69 ZNA: AD 5/90, Annual Report of Government Archives and Museum for the Year 1958,
- 3.
- 70 Ibid., 2.
- 71 ZNA: AB 41/27, Thompson to Acting Chief Secretary, 31 July 1958.
- 72 ZNA: AD 5/96, Thompson to Permanent Secretary for Finance, 22 March 1962.
- 73 ZNA: DF 9/6, Gray to Thompson, 11 May 1960.
- 74 ZNA: AD 5/7, Gray to Chief Secretary, 30 June 1962.
- 75 ZNA: AB 41/27, Alan Piper (Carnegie Foundation) to Chief Secretary, 24 October 1960.
- 76 ZNA: AB 41/27, Robert W. July, Assistant Director, to Chief Secretary, 18 October 1960.
- 77 ZNA: DF 9/6, Thompson to Gray, 3 June 1960.
- 78 ZNA: AD 5/7, Chief Secretary to British Resident, 21 April 1961.
- 79 ZNA: AD 5/96, Ledger, Acting Archivist-Curator to Education/Welfare department, 23 July 1963.
- 80 ZNA: AD 5/96, note by Permanent Secretary, 12 February 1964.
- 81 ZNA: AD 5/96, correspondence by Social and Welfare Committee, 10 March 1964.
- 82 Sheriff, Voogt, and Luhila, *The Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum*, 20.
- 83 Afro-Shirazi Party, *The Afro-Shirazi Party Revolution, 1964–1974* (Zanzibar: The Party,

1974).

⁸⁴ History was not formally reintroduced in the curriculum until the late 1990s: Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*, 5, 306, n 9.

⁸⁵ Afro-Shirazi Party, *The Afro-Shirazi Party Revolution*, 141.

⁸⁶ Myers, *Verandahs of Power*.

⁸⁷ Sheriff, *Zanzibar Stone Town*, 78.

⁸⁸ Sheriff, Voogt, and Luhila, *The Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum*, 25.

⁸⁹ Garth Myers recalls visiting the remnants of this display in 1989: Myers, *Verandahs of Power*, 1. Sheriff, Voogt and Luhila state it 'sank few local roots': Sheriff, Voogt, and Luhila, *The Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum*, 22. No precise date is given for this project in the literature.

⁹⁰ Sheriff, Voogt, and Luhila, *The Zanzibar House of Wonders Museum*, 24.

Conclusion

LEADERS, tourism operators, and residents of Zanzibar have joined hands of distress, following the collapse of [the] historical House of Wonders last Sunday, probably due to the ongoing rains.¹

On the night of 1–2 December 2012 a section at the rear of the Beit al-Ajaib – the location of the present-day Zanzibar National Museum of History and Culture – collapsed into the street. There were no injuries or fatalities on this occasion, unlike the accident of 1922 with which this book opened. After having gradually fallen into disrepair over several years, a section of the palace’s nineteenth-century structure had finally given way. Commentators used this event to criticise the lack of sustained conservation on the part of the Government in caring for Zanzibar’s Stone Town, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site.²

Structures like the Beit al-Ajaib and the Zanzibar Museum, while perhaps not perceived by connoisseurs as ‘great’ architecture, epitomise Zanzibar as a site of encounters. They remain powerful reminders of its history of colonisation – first Omani and then British although they were constructed out of materials unlikely to survive longer than a century in a tropical climate. Renovating and reclaiming them for contemporary purposes is an empowering but challenging prospect.³ The Beit al-Ajaib, re-configured as the Zanzibar National Museum of History and Culture, has successfully attracted a regular tourist audience but struggles to engage local visitors and is in need of major renovation. At the time of writing, plans are in place to move objects and displays from the Beit al-Ajaib back to the original Zanzibar Museum for temporary display until funds become available to repair the National Museum.⁴ After several years of closure, the domed edifice may once again house historic artefacts. Its long-term future, however, remains uncertain. Maintaining these buildings and reusing their spaces in a socially and economically viable way is an ongoing project that continues to be plagued by financial constraints, contestation over their function and government indecision.

These challenges, of course, have strong resonances in the history of the Zanzibar Museum revealed within this book. We have seen how, for example, the Museum was praised at the highest level of the Colonial Office and held up as a model educational institution. Yet by early 1942, Ailsa Nicol Smith, the energetic curator attempting to expand the Museum’s areas of success and professionalise the

institution, had resigned, leaving the Museum in the hands of part-time curators and the local staff. Struggles with the Government were just one element in the story. It is only through understanding the incongruous form and function of the Museum and its specific temporal and geographical context that such events can be explained. The negative influence of the Zanzibar Government is a central argument in this book, demanding a revision of the notion of a single, homogeneous British imperial project. Throughout these pages, the established binaries and dichotomies of colonialism are brought into question through the holistic analysis of this colonial institution.

Concepts

The detailed history presented here demonstrates how museums ‘are good to think with’ in the colonial setting, to paraphrase Appadurai and Breckenridge.⁵ The lens of the museum offers multiple new perspectives on Zanzibar’s colonial history, encompassing a wealth of insights from a location under-represented in the literature of twentieth-century imperial history. Conversely, a close acquaintance with the history of the British Empire, and Zanzibar specifically, allows us to reconsider the meaning of the colonial museum. I described museums in the introduction as ‘peculiar cultural entities’. Theoretical models based on European Enlightenment museums are inadequate for the analysis of twentieth century museums in the Empire. Intensive scrutiny of documentary evidence on the daily workings of the museum challenges the notion of the idealised museum and archive.⁶

Naturally, museums do act upon the imagination, but close attention to the realities of museum work demonstrates how fragile and compromised the resultant displays and activities were. Untangling the threads of power and impotence has been a major goal of this work, as has determining the agency of the individual within this web. Governmental intervention inhibited the initiatives of the curators, thus critically diminishing the Museum’s welfare role. Local interest encouraged displays of the curious and bizarre in spite of curatorial doubts. The scale and monumentality of the building, however flawed and distant from the architect’s vision, gave an appearance of order obscuring this state of tension. Yet even this imposing vision was episodic – the effect of the tropical environment on its surface and structure meant that every few years decay on the dome made the fragility of the whole enterprise only too clear.⁷

More significant than the model of the museum as an authoritarian temple of knowledge or a site for observing the population was the role it played in the colonial development agenda. The priority of its

progenitors was to create an educational facility, a particular model of which emerged out of local practice and global colonial discourse of the 1920s. Even this application of cultural knowledge to colonial governance must be qualified, however. Curators' research into and understanding of the local population certainly influenced the nature of the displays – in public health, agriculture, history and 'native industries'. These were closely related to governmental priorities in diversifying the economy and improving living conditions. Meticulous analysis of the experience 'on the ground', however, reveals the fractures, conflicts and failures that limited the successful realisation of Protectorate Government policy in the Museum. We saw, for example, how in the early 1940s, as the permanency of the curatorship was debated in straitened economic times, a proposal to expand Nicol Smith's role from curator into Government Anthropologist failed to come to fruition. Once again, prevarication and indecision stalled this initiative. Inconsistent support of the Government undermined the exertion of colonial power through the Museum.

The museums of East Africa are relatively late examples in the history of the colonial museum and therefore provide new examples of how and why museums were created. Mackenzie usefully proposes a series of phases in the development of museums, with the 'pre-modern' phase spanning the years from 1859 to the interwar years, while the modern phase, post-World War 2, is identifiable by the professionalism of the staff, the clear educational mission and consideration made to local communities.⁸ It is clear that the Zanzibar Museum is remarkable in the context of colonial museums for its early promotion of many of those activities defined as 'modern'. While the museum's fortunes waxed and waned, from 1925 to 1942 its curators reached beyond its monumental façade to advance their educational mission of self-improvement. Here we should note the influence of global movements outside the Colonial Office, particularly the role of the American philanthropic foundations whose sponsorship ranged from university anthropology departments in Britain to institutions across the British Empire. The receipt of funds from the Carnegie Corporation enabled an expansion of the public health programmes in the 1930s, the principles and priorities of the funding body at that time chiming with the Museum's agenda and the views of key members of Government. The resistance of the Government to make the curatorship permanent and their refusal to reappoint a full-time curator after Nicol Smith's departure led to the Carnegie funds being returned. In the late 1950s, approaches for international support to establish the archives were turned down by American charitable bodies. Local priorities at this time did not align with those of the

foundations, thus delaying further the archive project with the Government unwilling to commit adequate support.

Lives

My intention has been to tell a history of colonial Zanzibar through the Museum – its people, architecture and collection. I have sought to examine what the ‘things’ of colonialism – the buildings, archives and objects – and their creation, curation and management, can tell us about the lived colonial experience on the ground. Such an approach naturally demanded recovering the biographies of those who worked with these ‘things’, placing their individual actions within a geographical, social and temporal context. Inevitably, the emphasis has been upon the British community, those whose opinions speak loudest in the archives. This viewpoint accepts that a museum’s history reveals more about the perspectives of its progenitors than about the history it seeks to represent or its prospective audience. But the focus upon the interaction with the collection and the institution has revealed the involvement of a much wider community of people. It is impossible to consider the knowledge presented in the Museum as simply that of the coloniser, nor was its curation enacted without the participation of the local staff. Furthermore, the way in which knowledge was constructed demands an understanding not just of the behind-the-scenes workings of the institution but also of the particularities of the colonial context.

Many colonial careers involved postings of three to five years, allowing individuals to contribute fleetingly but significantly to the Museum. By contrast, long-term and local residents provided institutional and cultural memory. The success or failure of the transmission of this knowledge between generations of administrators and staff left a lasting legacy upon museum collections – as revealed in Nicol Smith’s frustration over her research. In that case, she mobilised her connections to her peers in the museum in Cambridge to fill in the gaps of knowledge about particular objects. We have seen also the significance of individuals acting within other networks such as Abdulrahman’s participation in the Arab teacher-training community and its influence upon the Museum’s historical narrative and history teaching across the region. We must be specific about museums and their activities in order to understand currents of knowledge, legacy and influence. Knowledge that flowed between imperial locations – from Singapore, from Zanzibar to London and back, on to Dar es Salaam and Rhodesia – was not just factual, but could be three-dimensional, in the form of audio-visual and pedagogic displays.

Individuals brought their own personal experiences to bear upon the Museum, determining its future direction. As a long-term resident, Spurrier had lived through historic events that affected Zanzibar's history, such as the end of slavery; he had also held various roles, and he had more intimate knowledge of the people than many of his colleagues. As we saw on in [Chapter 3](#) (p. 121), the Zanzibar Government relied upon him to keep them in touch with the people, through his personal experience in households as a medical doctor. One might consider that Spurrier's role as a public health educator in the Museum removed him from this more vigilant observation of local people's lives. He remained a mediator, but arguably was less of an 'informer' than he had been earlier – an interesting subversion of the idea of the museum as a site for surveillance. The duration of Spurrier's service, and his interests and priorities formed during 'pre-museum' years, critically influenced the Museum's mission and displays. The concept drew on both the historical vision of the 1900s and the more recent progressive educational work in public health. The close-knit community of colleagues and friends established the conceptual framework of the exhibits and educational activities. Nicol Smith keenly took up this mission, bringing to bear her professional museum experience from Britain. Although shifting priorities and responsibilities in the 1940s removed this element of the Museum's work, its physical remnants survived. By their very nature, museums retain the material legacies of collectors, curators or donors long after the individuals have gone. These collections – such as the public health exhibits – lingered as reminders of past initiatives or enthusiasms, inherited by successive curators forced to decide the future of the objects and the institution and to determine their own lasting contribution.

Thus, by starting with the 'things' of colonialism, we end up with myriad biographical threads intersecting in the Museum. There can be no better example, were it needed, of the agency of the individual in forging the history of a museum. Take, for example, the coincidence and interaction of Sinclair and Spurrier – the eclectic architect eager to imprint his architectural stamp on Zanzibar, and the retiring medical doctor, recognised for his missionary zeal in attempting to improve the health of the local people. Only through interrogating the imperial careers of these men can we properly understand the unconventional building that opened in 1925 as the Peace Memorial Museum. A critical element in understanding the twentieth-century colonial museum is the analysis of how these individuals exerted or failed to exert their will upon the institution, the building and the collection. The model of intersecting threads – disciplinary, biographical, geographical and temporal – is a productive and flexible

method by which to exploit the museum as a historical source.

When considering the types of evidence examined here, it is worth highlighting the integration of the history of the Archives into the study. The analysis presented above is both timely and revealing for historians of any place and period. Tracing the drawn-out creation of this institution provides a useful insight into the production of primary source material and the process by which documents are or are not retained. Archives are political entities, bodies of information usually preserved for official purposes, but which themselves, when read against the grain, offer further revelations about the colonial encounter, the ‘colonial common sense’ which is rarely committed to paper.⁹ Understanding better the formation of these repositories and the tensions that surrounded their establishment enhances our reading of these documents. Finding possible reasons for gaps in the archive, the perennial source of intrigue for historians, adds another layer to our interaction with the past and the filters through which we view it. For the present book, the Archives were not only the subject of enquiry as a related cultural institution, but also one of the two primary sites of research – the other being the Museum. The history preserved within the walls itself had been acted upon by the forces described in the records. The account of the lengthy and vexing struggle to create the Archives in [Chapter 6](#) suggests that it is somewhat remarkable that the project came to fruition at all.

Cultures

These approaches have enabled our investigation to overturn many of the prevailing assumptions about this Museum and colonial museums in general. The difficulties faced by its curators were not the result of the indifference of local people. Though the Museum’s public purpose was unashamedly paternalistic, it provided access to education – a colonial service that the British were slow to institute in Zanzibar. Whether this education was in the form of lectures to schools on history, films to adults or demonstrations of how to use mosquito nets, the curators attempted to find media – often the most up-to-date available – to communicate this information as widely as possible. It is sobering, too, to reflect on the fact that many of the concerns – health and living conditions, improved agricultural methods and maintenance of local craft traditions – remain on the development agenda to this day. Access to education created access to modernity, as shown by the enthusiasm of Muslim girls for education in the 1930s. The Museum played a vital part in this didactic ambition, as seen in the ever-growing numbers visiting its Library. It was not lack of interest by visitors that led to its decline in the early 1940s but

limited resources and mismanagement by the Government.

The Museum's architectural history shows how buildings, regularly interpreted as monuments to British imperial power, were often in fact the result of compromise, creating only an illusion of dominance. This is particularly significant when considering the common application of the model of Orientalism to architecture. Although Said himself worked with text, the physical prominence of such buildings, many of which still stand, naturally prompts analysis within the Orientalist framework. This study alerts us to the difficulties of ascribing simple notions of 'othering' to architecture. The influences upon the design were local and global, although its multiple Byzantine and Moorish references were reconstituted due to its problematic construction. It was also unique in its scale and ambition in Zanzibar: it can be seen as a corrective for the insufficiently 'Eastern' city. It was a new form of building in the 1920s; but so successful was John Sinclair in meeting the expectations of European visitors by creating a superficially 'Eastern' structure that the novelty it represented has been forgotten. The Museum has been subsumed by the people of Zanzibar into their cultural landscape in a region characterised by waves of cultural influence. Yet its structural concept was flawed, as the collapse during construction showed, and its spaces were ill suited to the intended functions. The cracks that appeared within only a few years of its opening were indicative of the Museum's troubled future.

The history of the Zanzibar Museum paints the picture of a constantly evolving institution, in contrast to the 'static' image formerly ascribed to it. Ingrams's displays in the first Museum annexe in the Indian Gaol interpreted East African objects in a comparative framework and reconstructed the rooms of Swahili and Arab homes. The determination to bring the Mwinyi Mkuu's bowl back to Zanzibar is an early example of restitution, a key debate in contemporary museum practice. Like the Zanzibar Exhibition of 1905, these ephemeral moments, which include the exhibitions and the education programme, need to be restored to the historical record, in order to expand our understanding of the cultural dynamics of colonial Zanzibar and the role of museums in the global context.

From its inception, the Zanzibar Museum was intended for use by members of all Zanzibar's communities. In this respect, as a public building, it was unique. Other venues, such as the Victoria Hall, hosted public events, but as an institution for use by the public of all ages and communities the Museum stood apart. It was an architectural novelty with its imposing exterior and spacious domed interior. On the day of the opening, after the formalities, the general public 'literally swarmed into the building'.¹⁰ The enthusiasm of the

two to three thousand visitors on the opening day was regarded as ‘a happy augury for the usefulness of the Museum’s future’.¹¹ Few Government buildings actively welcomed the full spectrum of the community through their doors and fewer still sought to engage with them. Not until the Sultan Khalifa Hall was built in Ng’ambo as a community centre in the 1940s would a comparable space be constructed in Zanzibar. In a town such as this, where restriction and access into residences, mosques and offices was controlled for social and religious reasons, the Museum departed from local norms.¹²

We must be wary of imposing contemporary ideas of ‘multicultural’ spaces upon the Zanzibar Museum in the colonial era. When opening the doors to draw in the public, the project was a patriarchal one of community development and responded to the socially restrictive ‘adapted’ education model. But, as this book has shown, participation in and influence upon the Museum took many forms. The local staff acted as mediators for the wider community: they acquired donations of objects, and spread awareness of the Museum’s interest in natural history and finds of artefacts. They assisted the curators with research on the objects. During Spurrier’s and Nicol Smith’s absences of leave and during the 1940s and 1950s, they kept the Museum functioning and provided essential continuity. Mzee Khamisi and Mzee Rajab both served the Museum for 20 years until their deaths. As Nicol Smith wrote, they were the kind of devoted staff found in museums the world over. One of their number, Himidi Msoma, became the permanent curator in the 1960s, having initially started work there in the 1940s. The local audience made their interests clear, thereby ensuring the expansion of the number of live natural-history exhibits, visited by islanders in their thousands.

The Zanzibar Museum is a microcosm through which to examine the impact of global trends – in museums, education, development and colonial administration. Within the Museum’s walls, issues of race, ethnicity, gender and professionalism were played out at a time when the very purpose of colonialism was subject to question. It was wedded to a trans-imperial identity connecting it to the wider empire. Its threefold mission was ‘to serve as a permanent memorial of the Peace, to commemorate those who gave their lives for the great cause [i.e. the Great War], and to be used as a public education Museum’.¹³ The First World War had been a global event that touched almost every corner of the Empire. The construction of memorials across territories gave the impression of binding the imagined imperial community together. The annual Armistice Day service ensured that this meaning survived. In the context of the 1920s, this coincided with the drive to highlight Zanzibar’s identity as separate from its mainland neighbours. Until the late nineteenth century, when

European governments carved up the Sultan's continental empire, the coastal Swahili regions had been ruled from Zanzibar. In many respects, therefore, this was a proto-national institution – establishing Zanzibar as a territory distinct from the Swahili regions on the mainland. The Museum's distinctive profile enshrines the memory of this transition.

‘Yes, of course we must have a Museum’.¹⁴

In Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief* the Emperor of Azania's interest in museums was fleeting; the following day he turned his attention to astronomy. In the nascent territory of Azania, a museum was an essential part of nation building. Yet the Emperor's distraction points to a larger recurrent problem. Rarely was the sustained maintenance of such institutions adequately anticipated and supported. Major progress was only possible with the support of individuals within the higher echelons of Government or external charitable funding. Governments, audiences and staff had conflicting expectations. Such tensions and contradictions were the reality of colonial museums, fractured and precarious symbols of empire.

- 1 'Tanzania: Mji Mkongwe Famous House of Wonder Collapses', *Tanzania Daily News*, 5 December 2012 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201212050313.html> accessed 1 June 2013.
- 2 Rosabelle Boswell, *Challenges to Identifying and Managing Intangible Cultural Heritage in Mauritius, Zanzibar and Seychelles* (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2008).
- 3 Sara Byala's history of MuseumAfrica in Johannesburg proposes the model of the museum as archive for contemporary postcolonial museums as a way of interacting dynamically with their inherently problematic institutional histories: Sara G. Byala, *A Place That Matters yet: John Gubbins's MuseumAfrica in the Postcolonial World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 238.
- 4 Pers. Comm. with Mr. Khamis Ali, Curator of the Zanzibar National Museum. September 2014.
- 5 Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, 'Museums Are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India', in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 34–55.
- 6 Richards, *The Imperial Archive*.
- 7 This study gives further evidence for Prakash's contention that the triumphalism of colonialism has successfully obscured its failures. Prakash, *Another Reason*, 19.
- 8 MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire*, 267–77.
- 9 Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 3.
- 10 *Gazette*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1764, 14 November 1925, 384.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 It should be noted that this is not to endorse the colonial construct of Zanzibar being a successfully ethnically segregated town, one which Sheriff, Bissell and Myers have refuted. See for example: Sheriff, 'The Spatial Dichotomy of Swahili Towns'.
- 13 *Gazette*, 14 November 1925, 384.
- 14 Waugh, *Black Mischief*, 190.

Appendix 1 List of Curators, Sultans, Consuls General and Residents to 1964

Curators of the Zanzibar Museum

1925–1935:	Dr Alfred Henry Spurrier
1935–1942:	Ailsa Nicol Smith
1943–1946:	J. D. Robertson (Honorary)
1946–1948:	I. E. F. Moultrie (Acting)
1948–1952:	J. D. Robertson (Part-time)
1953–1955:	G. A. Porteous (Acting)
1955–1956:	Edna Oxtoby (Acting)
1956–1962:	C. H. Thompson (Archivist and Curator)
1962–1963:	Sheikh Said Hilal al-Bualy
1963–1964:	Mrs Ledger (Acting)
1964	M. G. Cook
1964:	Himidi Msoma

Al-Busaidi Rulers of Zanzibar:

1807–1856:	Said bin Sultan
1856–1870:	Majid bin Said
1870–1888:	Barghash bin Said
1888–1890:	Khalifa bin Said
1890–1893:	Ali bin Said
1893–1896:	Hamad bin Thuwaini
1896:	Khalid bin Barghash
1896–1902:	Hamud bin Muhammad
1902–1911:	Ali bin Hamud
1911–1960:	Khalifa bin Harub
1960–1963:	Abdullah bin Khalifa
1963–1964:	Jamshid bin Abdullah

British Consuls General (Foreign Office)

1873–1887:	Sir John Kirk
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1887–1888:	Sir Claude MacDonald
1889–1891:	Colonel Sir Charles Euan Smith
1891–1892:	Sir Gerald Portal
1892–1894:	Sir Rennell Rodd
1894–1900:	Sir Arthur Hardinge
1900–1904:	Sir Charles Eliot
1904–1908:	Basil S. Cave
1909–1913:	Edward Clarke

British Residents (Colonial Office)

1913–1922:	Major F. B. Pearce
1922–1924:	J. H. Sinclair
1924–1930:	Sir Claud Hollis
1930–1937:	Sir Richard Rankine
1937–1941:	Sir John Hathorn Hall
1941–1946:	Sir Guy Pilling
1946–1952:	Sir Vincent Glenday
1952–1954:	Sir John Rankine
1954–1959:	Sir Henry Porter
1959–1963:	Sir George Mooring

Appendix 2

Detailed descriptions of photographs of the Museum in the 1920s and 1930s

Figure 4.4 BM: Af,B19.25 “The Royal Section” displaying images of the Sultans from Seyyid Said (top left) to Sultan Ali (bottom right). The portrait of the present Sultan, Khalifa bin Harub is in the centre. Saddles donated by the Sultan flank the display, beneath the royal standards. A table case in front includes manuscripts and books.

Figure 4.7 Af,B19.29 ‘Historical and Ethnological Section’:

Far left: Sultan’s saddle as visible in [Figure 4.4](#).

Against far left pier: large blocks of carved stone, including tombstones and columnette from Kizimkazi mosque;

Furthest left table case: pottery sherds.

Vertical stands near the back: two of photographs of carved doors; styles of boats in Zanzibar from ancient to modern; types of housing (‘origins of native tribes’); tombs; archaeological sites from across the region, including pillar tombs

On the floor against back wall: several pieces of carved masonry and grills, and a set of slave stocks resting on feet of stands.

Far table case – cannot be seen

Table case in front: further examples of sherds, a horn, bowls, glassware.

Right case against pier: archaeological pieces, and modern historical objects, including large bell.

Through arch – various local drums.

Front case: Ethnological section: Lower shelves – skulls of various primates in Zanzibar, some of which were ‘of considerable age’ and bore resemblance to man; upper shelves – human skulls of unknown origin. On right half of case, diagrams showing evolution from primates.

Visible through this case, against pier at right: Mwinku’s drum and horn.

Figure 4.8 BM: Af,B19.28 ‘The Native Industries section’.

Far left case: woodwork, including Arab sandals and two Swahili coconut graters.

Central display at back: pottery with a ship on a central high structure.

Right wall: basketry, matting and other woven items, including a hat.

Back wall: left – a ship on freestanding table, then examples of metalwork, including dishes and spherical incense burners; centre – photographs of craftsmen at work, an object hanging and a Pemba stool on the ground; right – fishing nets on ground beneath shelf of carved spoons.

Central table case in forefront: likely to be books and manuscripts from the Historical Section.

Far right pier: one of the Mwinyi Mkuu’s drums.

Figure 4.9 BM: Af,B19.31 Central case containing large ceramics and brass containers. The Mwinyi Mkuu’s bowl sits at the pinnacle of the display. The large ceramic jars were originally from Sultan Barghash’s collection from the House of Wonders. The photographer and another figure are visible in the reflection in the glass.

Figure 4.10 Interior of the Zanzibar Museum, undated, c. 1930s. Also reprinted in Crofton’s *Zanzibar Affairs*. ZNA: AV 32/48.

Left: central hexagonal case containing Mwinyi Mkuu’s bowl. Additional ceramics have been added at the top compared with 4.12.

Right vertical case: Explorers' exhibit.

Below – detail: showing part of the Explorers display including facsimiles of letters, images of Livingstone and Stanley, maps and photographs of locations mentioned on their journeys, including Victoria Falls.

Figure 4.12 The Lower West Bay: Kirk memorial display, 1933. NLS, Sir John Kirk papers, Acc 9942/47.

The Lower West Bay: 'relics of old time Zanzibar' – included after the extension was built in 1930. In the centre is an image of Seyyid Barghash to the left, Lloyd Mathews and to the right Sir John Kirk. Beneath the image of Kirk is a panoramic photograph of Zanzibar town. Against the wall are two 'Zanzibar' chests. Three *viti vya enzi* (chairs of power) are visible, one in the centre and one against either wall. The table cases contained manuscripts and smaller objects relating to these figures.

Figure 4.13 BM: Af,B19.26 'The Agricultural Section'.

Left case: samples of produce in jars.

Back wall, centre: 'Mkarafuu' (cloves), photographs of plantations above jarred samples.

Central table case at back: samples of seeds and specimens.

Back wall far right: photographs explaining clove production.

Right hand wall: glass samples of vanillin production process; more jars with range of 'Economic plants' in jars; 'miti ya thamani biada ya mikarafuu na minazi' – 'Trees of value including the clove and the coconut'.

Far right: display on pathological diseases and insects liable to attack crops.

On right pier: another standard.

Table case at front: Historical section objects, including ceremonial swords, guns and medals.

Figure 4.14 BM: Af,B19.30 Main entrance.

Left of door: Natural History section, including scaled-up models (e.g. flea) and specimens, including a duiker (bottom shelf).

Right of door: Arab clothing.

Left pier: Visitors' book and stool for attendant.

Right pier: Elephant skull with photographs of ivory trade below.

Table case: manuscripts and documents.

Figure 4.15 BM: Af,B19.27 'The Public Health Section'.

Far left: butterfly exhibit adjacent to tall case including specimens.

Arched niche at left: drawings and diagrams showing symptom to recognise, nature of infection, e.g. tapeworms, then modes of prevention in a lavatory. Beneath: posters, model of suitable housing and lavatory arrangements.

Freestanding case: information about diseases related to animals.

Poster on back wall: basic explanation of malaria: 'Source of Infection; Carrier of Infection; Recipient of Infection'.

Tall cases and table case by window – not clear.

Far wall between windows: images of notable scientists.

Tall case on right: bottled specimens, including snakes.

Central table case at front: part of historical section with Arab metalwork, including jewellery and brass vessels.

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